

POLICY BRIEF

Dec 17, 2019

Dr Thomas S. Wilkins is currently a Senior Fellow at the Japan Institute for International Affairs in Tokyo. He is normally based as a Senior Lecturer in International Security at the University of Sydney, Australia. He specializes in security issues in the Asia Pacific region and has published on this subject in journals such as *Review of International Studies*, *International Relations of the Asia Pacific* and the *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, among others.

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The Quad process: The evolution of diplomatic and maritime security cooperation in the Indo Pacific¹

Dr Thomas S. Wilkins

The Quad is back

The US-Japan-Australia-India Quadrilateral Strategic Dialogue (QSD), or simply “Quad,” process continues to attract the attention of policy-makers, analysts, and scholars interested in the impact of this new and potentially significant alignment formation on the security dynamics of the Indo Pacific region. The reemergence of the Quad meetings in 2017 after their abrupt termination over a decade ago in 2007 has led analysts to wonder if it is now here to stay this time as an enduring additional component of the region’s multifarious security architecture. It has also animated a heated debate about its true nature and purpose, with commentators bitterly divided in their appraisal. Some believe it lacks real substance and cohesion, whilst others argue it has the portentous makings of a new military alliance aimed at containing the PRC. Nevertheless, despite prodigious efforts on behalf of the strategic commentariat, the actual substance and nature of the Quad itself remains enveloped by mixed signals, misapprehensions, and mischaracterizations. As Graeme Dobell recounts: “The Quad is more notable for the questions it provokes than the answers it offers.”²

This *Policy Brief* aims at clarifying the current state of the Quad in the context of the Indo Pacific security environment by doing two things. Firstly, by exploring its multiple categorizations as some

1 This Policy Brief is grounded in discussion held at the “Quad-Plus” Dialogue co-sponsored by JIIA on 20 February 2019. The author also wishes to acknowledge Prof. Justin Hastings of the University of Sydney for the invitation to present on this topic at the Maritime Security Forum 15th November 2019.

2 Graeme Dobell, ‘The Quantity and Quality of Quad Questions,’ *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 25 February 2019, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-quantity-and-quality-of-quad-questions>.

form of security provider – is it an alliance, a unilateral institution, or security community – or some different form of security alignment altogether? Secondly, it proceeds to outline the content of the quad alignment – actual and potential – to substantiate its two-faceted nature as both (i) an important diplomatic vehicle, and (ii) as a means to coordinate on maritime security issues. It argues that we need to move beyond imprecise or outdated (“alliance-bound”) notions of how joint security cooperation is manifested in the Indo Pacific age, and that through the process of outlining its core diplomatic and maritime elements we can gain a better appreciation of what it actually is, what it actually does, and what it may become.

What is the quad?

The Quad first appeared in the form of joint security consultations between the US, Japan, Australia and India on the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 2007. According to an Australian Parliamentarian, it was simply viewed at the time as ‘the first informal meeting of officials from those four countries to look at issues of common interest.’³ But it lasted less than a year before being effectively terminated by an Australian government apparently unwilling or unable to withstand Chinese diplomatic pressure against its continuation (a fact later vehemently denied

by the then-Prime Minister Kevin Rudd).⁴ It then entered a ten-year hiatus during which evidence of China’s assertive behavior upon the regional order started to accumulate – such as its militarization of the South China Sea (SCS), domestic interference operations in Australia, and advancing strategic penetration of the Indian Ocean, South East Asia and Pacific Islands region. This resulted in a reactivation of the Quad in 2017 on the sidelines of the 2017 East Asia Summit (EAS), sometimes dubbed “Quad 2.0” or “Quad Redux”. Consequently, the 2019 US Indo Pacific Strategy Report now affirms that ‘The Quad is an important forum to discuss the respective Indo-Pacific visions of the four countries, all grounded in an affirmation of ASEAN centrality and building on existing trilateral relationships.’⁵ It has since met five times (to December 2019), been upgraded to Ministerial level, and has even tentatively expanded to include additional partners with a strategic interest in the Indo-Pacific concept, particularly the UK and France, with other potential interested parties from ASEAN and the Indian Ocean littoral hovering on the sidelines, but as yet uncommitted to joining.

Despite its rapid recrudescence it remains a much-misunderstood arrangement. It has been variously characterized as an ‘alliance,’⁶ ‘axis of democracies,’⁷ ‘security diamond’⁸ and a ‘containment’ mechanism,⁹ aimed at the PRC.

3 Parliament of Australia, ‘Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade,’ Foreign Affairs and Trade Portfolio, 28 May 2007, <https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au>.

4 Kevin Rudd, ‘The Convenient Rewriting of the History of the “Quad”: In Responding to China’s Rise, We Should Remember Our Experience of a Decade Ago,’ *Nikkei Asian Review*, 26 March 2019.

5 The United States Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region* (Washington, DC: The United States Department of Defense, 2019), p. 48.

6 Bob Carr, ‘The Shrinking “Quad”: How the Alliance Is Going Nowhere as Japan and India Court China,’ *South China Morning Post*, 17 May 2018.

7 Sudha Ramachandran, ‘Sino-Indian Joint Military Exercises: Out of Step,’ *China Brief*, The Jamestown Foundation, 7 November 2014.

8 Andrés Serbin, ‘Contending Geopolitical Narratives and Global Tectonic Shifts,’ *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 42:2, 2018, p. 198.

9 Joel Wuthnow, ‘Contested Strategies: China, the United States, and the Indo-Pacific Security Dilemma,’ *China International Strategy Review* 1:1, 2019, pp. 99–110; Mingfu Liu, *The China Dream : Great Power Thinking & Strategic Posture in the Post-American Era* (New York, NY: CN Times Books, 2015).

Some of these appellations are subjectively tethered to attempts to disparage or lend to support, accordingly. But taking an objective look at what the Quad actually constitutes in terms of a security alignment should clarify matters and assist in overcoming a multitude of accompanying misunderstandings or misperceptions. It should be noted that such an exercise must be necessarily qualified by *a degree of divergence among the Quad partners themselves* as to how they conceive of the arrangement, or on how they wish it to evolve in the future, which will be subsequently noted.

Based upon a long lineage of theorizing on the nature of practical security cooperation in the International Relations (IR) discipline, there is a strong claim to view the Quad as some form of security alignment. According to Walt and Stephen David, ‘alignment’ is ‘a relationship between two or more states that involves mutual expectations of some degree of policy coordination on security issues under certain conditions.’¹⁰ Such alignments may take on difficult guises according to their purpose, intensity and degree of formal institutionalization. These include well-known archetypes of alignment, such as the omnipresent ‘alliance,’ ‘coalitions,’ ‘ententes’ and ‘security communities,’ to name the most prominent examples.¹¹ Matched against commonly held criteria the Quad (as yet) convincingly conforms to none of these and they should therefore be discarded as accurate or appropriate descriptors.

Instead, I argue that the Quad is a new and less familiar form of security alignment. It represents a dedicated “Strategic Partnership Network.” As with all forms of security

alignment it is emblematic of a range of commonly-shared security interests, reinforced through convergent values-system, and grounded in a degree of informal/formal diplomatic and practical institutional linkages. It must be stated unequivocally at this point, that security alignments – such as strategic partnerships – are not to be conflated with *inclusive* security dialogue forums – such as the EAS or ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), for example – as these types of multilateral institutions are characterized by superintending efforts to overcome or resolve contending or conflicting security concerns (i.e. divergent interests and values), not jointly and exclusively advance them in unison. In contrast then, strategic partnership itself embodies an effort at structured collaboration between states to take joint advantage of economic opportunities, or to respond to security challenges more effectively than could be achieved in isolation.¹² These strategic partnerships typically encompass joint diplomatic and security cooperation (normally including joint leadership summit meetings as well as “2+2” Foreign and Defense Minister meetings), a degree of defence and mil-mil ties, often including joint exercises, and even state-backed cultural avenues of cooperation. When multiple and interlocking strategic partnerships are in effect, they form a mutually-reinforcing “network.” (Note: The Quad is also referred to as “minilateral,” but this has no bearing on its de facto constitution as a “Strategic Partnership network”).

This seems to capture well the versatile, informal and ‘networked’ nature of Quadrilateral security alignment, where one layer of interaction/formal linkage is layered upon others. There are three constitutive facets

10 Cited in Eric Miller and Arkady Toritsyn, ‘Bringing the Leader Back In: Internal Threats and Alignment Theory in the Commonwealth of Independent States,’ *Security Studies* 14:2, 2005, p. 333.

11 Thomas Wilkins, “Alignment,” Not “Alliance” – the Shifting Paradigm of International Security Cooperation: Toward a Conceptual Taxonomy of Alignment,’ *Review of International Studies* 38:1, 2012, pp. 53-76.

12 Thomas Wilkins, *Security in Asia Pacific : The Dynamics of Alignment* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2019), p. 125.

to the Quad strategic partnership network. First there are the Quad consultations, which were upgraded to the Ministerial level (as per strategic partnership model just cited above). Consultations on issues of common concern also occur in various Track 1.5 dialogues (e.g. Raisina Dialogue) and through other multilateral forums, allowing for “virtual” coordination related to, but not formalized, as Quad cooperation. Second, in addition to this direct quadrilateral consultation, which may appear rather insubstantial, however is much more concrete evidence of cooperative activities that occurs through a “network” or interlocking bilateral (and trilateral) arrangements between the powers. With respect to the bilateral facet, Japan and Australia are direct military allies of the United States. Additionally, they are “special strategic partners” themselves, and both have Strategic Partnerships with New Delhi, which also enjoys an important bilateral Strategic Partnership with Washington; all of which conform to the definitional criteria above. This amounts to a ‘strategic partnership network.’ In the case of trilateral linkages, the US, Japan and Australia are further aligned through the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD). India also engages in trilateral cooperation with the US and Japan on one hand, and Australia and Japan on the other. These trilateral facets add yet another constituent layer to support and substantiate the Quad itself. Thus, as Dhruva Jaishankar points out ‘It’s helpful to examine the Quad less as a bloc of four countries and more as a matrix of trilateral and bilateral relationships. The four already enjoy three trilateral and six bilateral strategic dialogues, not counting a host of other military engagements and working groups.’¹³

One notable characteristic of strategic partnership (networks) – in contradistinction

to traditional military alliances – is the “goal-orientated,” rather than explicitly “threat-orientated” drivers behind it. In other words, a strategic partnership is typically orientated toward accomplishing positive objectives (and preventing negative outcomes), than preparing to defend or attack and opposing third party, as per a traditional military alliance. According to the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example: “the Indo pacific is for something - not against somebody.”¹⁴ That said, challenges to shared interests and values among the Quad partners have naturally coalesced around the PRC as an unspoken “other” due to the challenges it presents to these positive values, such as the “Rules-based Order” (RBO) through its own clearly competing vision of regional order, (discussed below). But this is still far from a concrete effort at alliance-type military balancing or containment, it should be remembered. On this basis, it is worthwhile to expand upon two of the central strategic elements of the Quad alignment that serve to exemplify these claims. Indeed, As Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne highlighted at the September 2019 Quad Ministerial meeting, the Quad is seen as mechanism to address “maritime security, infrastructure and connectivity in support of rules-based frameworks.”¹⁵

(i) Quadrilateral diplomatic convergence

Like all genuine security alignments (as opposed to multilateral dialogue forums), the Quad has been actuated by a range over overlapping common strategic interests and reinforced through shared values, which were explicitly emphasized at the latest Quad meeting. This section now explores these unifying factors that have crystalized diplomatic

13 Dhruva Jaishankar, ‘The Real Significance of the Quad,’ *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 24 October 2018.

14 Ministry of External Affairs of India, ‘External Affairs Minister’s Remarks During Press Interaction with Secretary of State of the United States of America,’ 26 June 2019.

15 Elouise Fowler, ‘India Ramps up Involvement in “Quad” Talks,’ *Financial Review*, 27 September 2019.

alignment through the Quad mechanism.

Firstly, the Quad is invariably tethered to the newly prominent strategic concept of the “Indo Pacific” (IP). Occasionally the Quad and the Indo Pacific have been conflated as one entity, with Quad seen as the political manifestation of the Indo Pacific geopolitical construct.¹⁶ Indeed, Huong Le Thu notes that ‘A key to the success of the Quad is its relationship with the Indo-Pacific concept.’¹⁷ In essence the Indo Pacific concept embodies a “duality” as both a (neutral) regional descriptor and an identifiable strategic arena for the dedicated policies of the Quad powers, as Rory Medcalf and others have noted.¹⁸ Thus, the IP is a defining element of the regional security policies of the four partners, around which they have crafted more of less explicit versions of their own “Indo Pacific strategies” which reflect their strategic interests and national values.¹⁹ Again, this was underlined by a Senior US State department Official at the most recent Quad meeting when he affirmed that ‘We have our Indo-Pacific strategy, the other three have very similar and overlapping strategies that deal with their interests throughout the region.’²⁰

Secondly, on the basis of this new strategic

concept, the Quad parties are aligned toward protecting the “Rules Based Order” (RBO) in the Indo Pacific region. At the 2019 Quad meeting in Bangkok ‘The four nations reaffirmed their shared commitment to preserving and promoting the rules-based order in the region.’²¹ This notion has featured prominently in the policy documents and statements of the four powers as reflection of the aforementioned values and interests. Specifically, many of the RBO’s objectives have been operationalized through the closely associated “Free and Open Indo Pacific” (FOIP) strategy/vision.²² Huong Le Thu also notes that ‘Quad 2.0 coincides with the promotion of the theme of a “free and open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP), also articulated (although not without differences) by the four partners.’²³ This initiative was first championed by Japan as a follow through on Prime Minister Abe’s earlier notions of a “arc of freedom and prosperity,” and “democratic security diamond,” and has subsequently been adopted as a centerpiece of the American Indo Pacific Strategy Report (IPSR).²⁴ India has officially endorsed the FOIP (with some caveats) and Australia adheres to it in all but name, preferring the pedantic descriptor “Open, inclusive and prosperous Indo Pacific” (OIPIP); a label that has not stuck.²⁵ In its Japanese expression, the FOIP is aimed at

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- 16 Thomas Wilkins, ‘Australia and the “Indo Pacific” Concept – Disambiguating the “Idea” and the “Region” from Quadrilateral “Strategy,”’ *Policy Brief*, The Japan Institute of International Affairs, 19 July 2018.
- 17 Huong Le Thu, ‘New Perspectives for the Revived Quad,’ *The Strategist of Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, 14 February 2019, p. 2.
- 18 Rory Medcalf, ‘Indo-Pacific Visions: Giving Solidarity a Chance,’ *Asia Policy* 14:3, 2019, pp. 79-95.
- 19 Thomas Wilkins, ‘Does Australia Have an “Indo Pacific Strategy”?,’ *Policy Brief*, Japan Institute for International Affairs, 29 July 2019.
- 20 Fowler, ‘India Ramps up Involvement in “Quad” Talks.’
- 21 U.S. Department of State, ‘U.S.-Australia-India-Japan Consultations (“the Quad”),’ Office of the Spokesperson, 31 May 2019, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-australia-india-japan-consultations-the-quad>.
- 22 Jonathan Berkshire Miller and Thomas Wilkins, ‘The Role for Middle Powers in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Looking at Opportunities for Canada and Australia,’ *Policy Brief*, Japan Institute of International Affairs, 28 June 2019.
- 23 Le Thu, ‘New Perspectives for the Revived Quad,’ p. 2.
- 24 The United States Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*.
- 25 Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper* (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2017).

the following: ‘Promotion and establishment of the rule of law, freedom of navigation, free trade, etc.; Pursuit of economic prosperity; and Commitment for peace and stability.’²⁶ Underlying these FOIP principles have been a range of coordinated or individually intersecting initiatives to improve regional connectivity and supply much-needed infrastructural funding and expertise across the region, combined with mutual assistance in the area of maritime security (discussed in the next section). But at this point it must be empathically noted that ‘while the FOIP advocates openness and *inclusivity*’ in some respects, ‘the Quad is a minilateral [strategic partnership network], which by definition has *exclusive* membership and a limited and sharply focused agenda.’²⁷ This is what distinguishes the Quad per se as an *alignment* from a broader *policy* (FOIP) that its partners jointly advocate.

Thirdly, despite scrupulous efforts at diplomatic obfuscation, it is commonly understood that the actions of the PRC have served to unify the four partners through the processes just described. In the context of ever accumulating Chinese power, the four countries have looked apprehensively upon the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as it seeks to spread economic, and with it political, influence across the entire IP region. Washington and Tokyo are opposed to this on a general level, including the militarization of the SCS, whilst Canberra and New Delhi are specifically concerned about penetration of their own strategic “backyards” – the South Pacific in the case of the former, and South Asia (e.g. Pakistan) and Indian Ocean, in the case of the latter. As such, the IP, Quad and FOIP stake out the contours of

an “alternative” vision to a Chinese-dominated region, in the geopolitical, economic, and ideological spheres. As Medcalf attests ‘The Indo-Pacific is being posited as a counter to a China-centric view of regional order under the Belt and Road Initiative.’²⁸ Needless to say, the IP and FOIP as strategic concepts enunciated by the Quad powers have drawn suitable ire from Beijing, which characterizes all three as nascent containment policies put forward by a proto-alliance. A representative comment comes from Mingfu Liu, a professor at China’s National Defense University, as follows: ‘American has entered into an alliance with Australia, India, and Japan to curb China’ as China is expected to overtake America.²⁹ Likewise, after a poor reception among South East Asian capitals, the Quad quickly modified its rhetoric to recognize the contained salience of “ASEAN centrality” to the regional architecture, and seeks to harmonize its activities with willing partners among them. Rather than undermine ASEAN, Bhubhinder Singh claims - ‘it strengthens cooperation through other multilateral security arrangements in the region. All four countries are integrated into the ASEAN-led regional security architecture through their status as dialogue partners of ASEAN.’³⁰

This is not to suggest that adherence to the IP concept, the FOIP principles, or common aversion to Chinese expansionism has eliminated all diverging interests or worldviews between the partners. Like all alignments, common interests are the fulcrum of cooperation, but other individual nationally orientated interests will persist, and occasionally conflict, with the common cause. As Nick Bisley identifies ‘each of the four parties has somewhat

26 The Government of Japan, ‘Towards Free and Open Indo-Pacific,’ June 2019, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000407643.pdf>.

27 Le Thu, ‘New Perspectives for the Revived Quad,’ p. 2. [Italics added]

28 Medcalf, ‘Indo-Pacific Visions: Giving Solidarity a Chance,’ p. 80.

29 Liu, *The China Dream : Great Power Thinking & Strategic Posture in the Post-American Era*, chapter 6.

30 Bhubhinder Singh, ‘The Quad as an Enabler of Regional Security Cooperation,’ *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 13 November 2018.

different security interests at stake in the region. While they all have a general interest in curbing PRC assertiveness, there is not a single vital national interest that all four share.³¹ It is well-known that the Washington Administration has a greater appetite for push back against Beijing than its partners, for example. Japan is in in closest conformity with this posture, though is presently seeking to harmonize its relations with the PRC. As a lesser power, Australia is more conflicted due to internal debates upon the economic and political costs of resisting China explicitly, though as a result of Chinese domestic interference operations its stance had hardened somewhat. India on the other hand is protective of its “strategic autonomy” and is divided between its latent rivalry with China and its troublesome Pakistani neighbor.³² For this reason, New Delhi has made repeated efforts to dilute the common front of the FOIP, and even avoid mention of the “Quad” itself on some key platforms, such as the 2019 Shangri-La security dialogue. Thus, Rory Medcalf reminds us that ‘the multiplicity of Indo-Pacific visions put forward by different countries highlights their fundamental inability to agree on how to respond to Chinese power and U.S.-China tensions.’³³

(ii) Practical quadrilateral cooperation in the maritime sphere

Andrew Shearer has advocated ‘The Quad should be driven by function rather than form: the best way to consolidate support in all four capitals is to focus on producing results.’³⁴ One way that concrete quadrilateral cooperation, both directly and indirectly, manifests itself under this broader diplomatic umbrella is in

the sphere of maritime security cooperation. This is particularly apposite as the Indo Pacific as a strategically conceived region is maritime by nature; defined by trade flows and naval operations, and always has been.³⁵ There are a range of existing and potential areas in which the Quad powers work together on the maritime front.

Most closely related to upholding the RBO in the maritime sphere is a commitment to common “rules of the road” with regard to conduct on the high seas. At the centre of this posture is a support for international law and norms, principally UN convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This includes safeguarding of the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) from interdiction by either a strategic of non-state actors (such as pirates or terrorists). The Quad parties are committed to freedom of navigation and overflight, with the US most prolifically conducting dedicated FONOPS near Chinese built artificial features in the SCS, and Japan and Australia engaged in less controversial, lower profile operations. Other such maritime rules of the road include measures to reduce the risk of accidents or unplanned naval encounters, with the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES) being a centerpiece of these efforts. The prospect of a finalized Code of Conduct in the SCS among the regional parties is strongly supported by the Quad countries, but appears distant at this time, and thus remains a cause for concern.

A second and related area of functional cooperation among the partners is their shared desire to coordinate on issues of Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA). Lavina Lee

31 Nick Bisley, ‘Is There a Problem With ... The Quad?’, *Policy Brief*, China Matters, July 2018.
 32 Monika Chansoria, ‘Rethinking Regionalism in Asia: Influence of India’s Pragmatic Ancient Statecraft Arthashastra,’ *Policy Brief*, Japan Institute of International Affairs, 10 April 2018.
 33 Medcalf, ‘Indo-Pacific Visions: Giving Solidarity a Chance,’ p. 82.
 34 Andrew Shearer, ‘Quad Redux: A New Agenda for Asia’s Maritime Democracies,’ *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, 10 November 2017.
 35 Michael Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* (London: Routledge, 2003).

identifies that ‘This may be in the form of access to military technology designed for this purpose (for example, India’s introduction of US P-8 surveillance and strike aircraft), development of jointly used military infrastructure (bases, ports, airstrips) and information- and intelligence-sharing.’³⁶ This could also extend into the information-sharing sphere (where the TSD partners have common agreements in place), with Tanvi Madan suggesting that ‘the quadrilateral could be a useful platform to share assessments of Chinese capabilities, intentions and actions, and ways of dealing with them.’³⁷ A harder dimension to this is potential collaboration on Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) of which all the partners have much to share in terms of best practice, interoperability, and joint training. Andrew Shearer advocates that the Quad ‘ultimately cover...high-end missions such as theatre anti-submarine warfare — a growing priority as Chinese submarines enter the Indian Ocean in increasing numbers.’³⁸ However, given the sensitivity of the high-end naval assets involved, there may be reluctance to deepen this aspect too far.

Given the defining maritime nature of the Indo Pacific, closer naval cooperation between the Quad countries in a quadrilateral, trilateral, or separate bilateral format, is highly appropriate. Indeed, naval cooperation is generally regarded as the easiest form of mil-to-mil cooperation as it usually takes place offshore (thus obviating any national territorial sensitivities) and can be centered around confidence building measures (CBMs) and joint training exchanges. So far attempts to effectively quadrilateralize the (now trilateral)

MALABAR Exercises, by admitting Australia have been stymied by New Delhi, as instigator of these maneuvers. However, India and Australia conduct regular exercises such as AUSINDEX, whilst other Quad countries also hold joint naval exercises including ANNUALEX (US-Japan), TALISMAN SABRE (US-Australia), and JIMEX (Japan-India). Such exercises are required for the partners to achieve their aim of improving their coverage of MDA and overall interoperability, as well as sharing perspectives on “grey area” scenarios, within their broader maritime strategies.

Naturally, the kind of minilateral exercises just detailed assist the Quad parties in addressing a range of shared maritime Non-Traditional Security (NTS) challenges, as well as quietly laying the groundwork for a higher degree of military interoperability in the event of a regional conflict scenario. Indeed, the successful maritime HA/DR cooperation of the “core group” in the wake of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami could be identified as the genesis of the Quad project itself. Moreover, the partners also have strong incentives to coordinate on counter Piracy and Counter-Terrorism activities ‘outside the realm of grand strategy’ according to Sarah Percy.³⁹ Brewster argues that Coast Guard cooperation should also be part of this larger naval interaction, to address NTS issues such as illegal fishing, drug/people smuggling, and general maritime law enforcement. He notes that ‘As principally law-enforcement agencies, coast guards can provide many practical benefits in building a stable and secure maritime domain, without the overtones of a military alliance.’⁴⁰

36 Lavina Lee, ‘India Has the Most to Lose If It Doesn’t Embrace the Quad,’ *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 8 November 2018.

37 Tanvi Madan, ‘The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of the “Quad”’, *War on Rocks*, 16 November 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/11/rise-fall-rebirth-quad>.

38 Shearer, ‘Quad Redux: A New Agenda for Asia’s Maritime Democracies.’

39 Sarah Percy, ‘Maritime Crime in the Indian Ocean: The Role of the Quad,’ in Andrew Carr, ed., *Debating the Quad* (Strategic & Defence Studies Centre, ANU College of Asia & the Pacific, 2018), p. 24.

40 David Brewster, ‘It’s Time for a “Quad” of Coast Guards,’ *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, 12 August 2019.

Such concerns are not confined to the Quad membership themselves, but extend across the Indo Pacific region, where the partners collectively or individually have sought to assist threatened regional states through capacity-building initiatives. Official Development Assistance (ODA) and other capacity-building actions toward littoral states of the Indian Ocean, South East Asia and the PICS are aimed at assisting them build up their own MDA to help them combat the challenges mentioned above, in addition to improving their national resilience and ability to withstand strategic penetration by Chinese pressure or maritime incursions. A prime example of this is the US Maritime Security Initiative (MSI):

‘MSI authorizes the provision of training, equipment, supplies, and small-scale construction to the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh to enhance their ability to “sense, share, and contribute” to maritime security and MDA; to create a common Regional Maritime Picture; and to empower them to observe and control more effectively their own sovereign maritime spaces, both individually and jointly.’⁴¹

Just one example of this is Australia supply of maritime patrol boats as ODA to the PICS, and the establishment of the Australia Pacific Security College in Canberra under its Pacific “step up” policy. Japan assisted the Philippines and Timor-Leste in their HA/DR capacity building and provided road construction training at Cambodia’s PKO training centre since 2012. Japan also aided Vietnam in underwater medicine and disposing bombs underwater since 2012.⁴²

Finally, there is an important economic dimension to such broader efforts among the Quad partners. The FOIP in particular has a strong economic as well as strategic element aimed at addressing the infrastructure building and investment needs of third parties. Members of the Quad individually or jointly have provided financial or material assistance in developing the port infrastructure of the IP region to enhance connectivity and to counter prolific Chinese efforts to do the same. For example the Japan international Cooperation Agency (JICA) is involved in major port projects in Mozambique (Nacala), Kenya (Mombasa), Madagascar (Taomasina), Oman (Duqm), India (Mumbai), and Myanmar (Yangon), with other possible contracts on the horizon in Bangladesh, and possibly Sri Lanka (in partnership with India).⁴³ The Trilateral Investment Fund set up by the TSD powers, and Australia’s Infrastructure Development Fund for the PICS, including the supply of undersea fiber optic cables between Australia, New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands, exemplify such efforts at achieving “high quality infrastructure” for the region.

Conclusions

The cooperation detailed above in respect to diplomatic coordination and maritime security issues, demonstrate the purpose and nature of the Quad as a security alignment. According to Hall then ‘The Quad is, in other words, an extension of evolving practices, not a radical or destabilising innovation.’⁴⁴ The Quad process has only recently been revived and so much remains uncertain as to its future trajectory, and whether for example it will be upgraded to the ministerial level or comprise regular heads of government meetings. Nevertheless, according

41 The United States Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*.
 42 Ministry of Defense, *Japan’s Defense Capacity Building Assistance* (Tokyo: Ministry of Defense, 2016).
 43 David Brewster, ‘A “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” and What It Means for Australia,’ *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, 7 March 2018.
 44 Ian Hall, ‘Advancing the Quad through Diversification,’ *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, 30 November 2017.

to Sameer Lalwani and Heather Byrne ‘the contours of the Quad are likely to persist even if it is never fleshed out’⁴⁵ Indeed, the four countries ‘today, the four enjoy unprecedented levels of information and intelligence exchanges, personnel interactions, interoperable equipment and habits of cooperation’, according to Dhruva Jaishankar.⁴⁶ What we do know is that it does not, by any stretch of the definition, conform to more precise and concrete definitions of a traditional military defence “alliance” at present. Notably, it contains no mutual security guarantee or joint alliance planning. Though it must be understood that public commentators rarely adhere to the more fine-grained descriptors employed by scholars and strategic analysts, this mischaracterization is to a degree understandable and unavoidable, despite its problematic implications. Instead, the Quad is better conceptualized as a strategic partnership network with the actual quadrilateral consultations simply crowning the wide and dense web of bilateral and trilateral interactions that knit together the four powers. As Dhruva Jaishankar attests ‘Strategic partnerships between all four countries are steadily deepening, and this process has only accelerated.’⁴⁷

Furthermore, it needs to be understood that the Quad is further embodied by their joint adherence to the IP strategic concept, and the FOIP foreign policy strategy/vision that accompanies it. As Ramesh Thakur notes ‘The Indo-Pacific frame integrates geography, the ‘free and open’ principle and democratic values into one strategic construct.’⁴⁸ But these latter two should not be conflated with the Quad itself, or with one another, but they do exemplify the objectives of the quad powers individually and

collectively (to differing degrees). Moreover, whilst the IP construct and the FOIP policy are at least nominally neutral and inclusive concepts respectively, the Quad itself is de facto an exclusive alignment arrangement, open to new adherents through the Quad-plus process, but unlikely to compromise its core principles to incorporate external states that challenge or oppose them. In part due to some significant divergences on various issues among the Quad partners themselves it is far from a unified containment mechanism aimed at China, but rather ‘It serves the limited purpose of political signaling and improves coordination among a set of like-minded and capable maritime powers in the Indo-Pacific.’⁴⁹ Indeed, its future evolution and scope as a security alignment will depend as much upon how strategic dynamics of the IP continue to unfold.

45 Sameer Lalwani and Heather Byrne, ‘The Quad: Alliance or Alignment?’, India Seminar, The Stimson Center, 10 April 2019, <https://www.stimson.org/content/quad-alliance-or-alignment-0>.

46 Jaishankar, ‘The Real Significance of the Quad.’

47 Jaishankar, ‘The Real Significance of the Quad.’

48 Ramesh Thakur, ‘Australia and the Quad,’ *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 5 July 2018.

49 Jaishankar, ‘The Real Significance of the Quad.’