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# An Analysis of Quad's Revival

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## ABSTRACT

*The whole world today stands witness to the ever increasing dominance of China. In view of the same, it has now become even more pertinent that alliances are formed so as to limit the threat it poses to world peace. One such alliance is the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD). This piece briefly describes the roots of this alliance and its history with China. Next, it analyses how China's relations with the four countries have evolved: from the time the alliance was dissolved to the present times when it is gaining strategic importance. Having seen the rationale behind this formation, the article seeks to perceive its future and its potential dynamics with China.*

**Keywords-** *Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, China, Democratic Security Diamond, Indo-Pacific, Tsunami Core Group, Diplomacy.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The QUAD- Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is an informal grouping of the four nations of India, the USA, Japan and Australia. Having first emerged in 2007 as a response to the devastating Boxing Day Tsunami of 2004, it dissolved rather quickly in 2008 itself (Buchan & Rimland, 2020).

Since then, the global order has changed significantly and so have these countries' relations with each other and other countries, particularly China. The QUAD has now once again emerged (in 2017) in a quite different global scenario, after a decade of bilateral and trilateral diplomatic engagement.

## II. QUAD'S HISTORY WITH CHINA

The ideological component of the QUAD was first gained when the then candidate for Prime Ministership of Japan, Shinzo Abe (who won eventually) proposed an 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity' in 2006. This was also supported by Foreign Minister Taro Arso. Things began falling into place when Dr. Manmohan Singh (the then PM of India) visited Tokyo and issued a joint statement that both countries were eager to begin a dialogue with other 'like-minded countries in the Asia-Pacific region' to address themes of 'mutual interest'. Subsequently, US

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Vice President Dick Cheney signalled American interest in a QUAD dialogue in early 2007 and also consulted with Australian Prime Minister John Harward on the same. Eventually, Pranab Mukherjee's (then President of India) visit to Tokyo and Abe and Aso's visits to India and Washington led to the first quadrilateral meeting (Buchan & Rimland, 2020).

The meeting was characterized as having been held for the common interest of the dialogue partners including disaster relief. The only military exercise associated with QUAD 1.0 was the second Malabar of 2007, featuring the four navies along with the Singaporean navy exercising in the Bay of Bengal (Buchan & Rimland, 2020).

China demonstrated strong opposition to this alliance, even filing official demarches with each of the four countries. Considering that the objective of this alliance was quite vague, it also gave rise to radical speculations that it would turn out to be an Asian NATO or otherwise evolve into a security alliance. All of this led to hesitation among the four countries to formalise the dialogue (Buchan & Rimland, 2020).

Eventually, China's opposition took a toll on Australia and India's interests to remain in the grouping. India did not want to be seen as 'Anti- China' in a polarised way. It has been stated that there were significant protests in India over the 2nd Malabar of 2007 which threatened PM Manmohan Singh's political capital for passage of the US-India civil nuclear deal. Australia too enjoyed good relations with China under the Kevin Rudd government. Eventually all momentum stood lost after the alliance lost its main cheerleader and architect Shinzo Abe as he resigned from the post of Prime Minister (Buchan & Rimland, 2020).

The alliance eventually collapsed when Australian PM Kevin Rudd directed Foreign Minister Stephen Smith to withdraw from the dialogue.

### **III. THE REVIVAL**

The most pertinent reason behind the revival of the QUAD is China itself. The balances of the world have tilted and each country's relations with China have not been all sweet and good. The world now faces a more dominating and powerful China, and that is also why the QUAD is sometimes viewed as important so as to put a check on its growing strength.

#### **A. THE CASE WITH INDIA**

India's interest in QUAD is quite directly viewed as a result of the Doklam standoff of 2017. China has been a significant roadblock in India's membership of NSG (Buchan & Rimland, 2020) as also in its efforts to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Also, India is opposed to China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative, considering that certain

elements of it pass through Pakistan-occupied territory of Kashmir (PoK). It is also wary of China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative as it seeks to develop the Gwadar port which is a deep sea port in the Southwest Balochistan province of Pakistan. Touted as a commercial project, it is intended to form a natural link between the overland and maritime components of the Chinese Belt and Road strategy. However, the increasing Chinese military presence in the Indian Ocean raises questions about this assertion (Gale & Shearer, 2018).

Then came the pandemic. It not only showed that a virus originating in China could cripple the world (owing to their reluctance to accept responsibility for negligence), but that the world's dependence on China was rather debilitating (Bagchi, 2020). China's invasion into the LAC further infuriated India, particularly after the violence at Galwan which led to the killing of 20 Indian soldiers. In a rather strategic response, the Indian government banned 59 Chinese apps in the country.

Thus, there is no reason why India would not pursue its interest through QUAD, given that China poses an open threat to its security and sovereignty.

#### **B. THE CASE WITH AUSTRALIA**

Australia, as pointed out earlier too, enjoyed a good relationship with China under the Kevin Rudd government. Australia's decision to participate in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the subsequent sale of the Port of Darwin to a company linked with the OBOR did not go quite well with the US. However, Australia's response to the OBOR was largely ambivalent, with it deciding not to join the initiative formally (Gale & Shearer, 2018).

Ever since, Australia and China have not been on much good terms. China's alleged interference in the internal institutions of Australia, through the United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party led to the enactment of Espionage and Foreign Interference Act 2018 (Manuel, 2019). Australia has also come out openly to blame China for the coronavirus pandemic and has also invoked Chinese ire for suspending the Hong Kong extradition treaty and announcing new visa rules for them.

#### **C. THE CASE WITH JAPAN**

Japan fears that the MSR initiative could be employed to limit or block energy shipments to limit or block energy shipments to East Asia. Japan is particularly vulnerable to supply chain disruptions because it imports some 90 percent of its energy (Gale & Shearer, 2018).

In response to Japan's detention of a Chinese Fishing Trawler captain, the Chinese government had blocked exports of a crucial category of minerals to Japan in 2010. Chinese custom officials

halted shipments of so-called rare earth elements, preventing them from being loaded aboard ships at Chinese ports (Bradsher, 2010). It has been expressed that this precedent suggests it is not implausible that in the future, Beijing could engage in routing a large proportion of energy supplies through the Gwadar Port, ultimately to be stored or resold by China, limiting the amount of energy that passes through the strait of Malacca (Gale & Shearer, 2018). There was also a crisis in 2012, owing to Japanese ‘nationalisation’ of the Diaoyu Islands (Hughes, 2013). Since then, there have been tensions pertaining to the contiguous zone of the Senkakus. Chinese ships and aircrafts began to pass through the Miyako Strait on their way to the Western Pacific, which underlined that the Chinese military viewed Japan’s southwestern islands as a barrier to open ocean access (Buchan & Rimland, 2020).

#### **D. THE CASE WITH USA**

The USA and China do not enjoy a good relationship either.

In a testimony before the Senate Armed services committee, Commander of the US Southern Command, Adm. Kurt Tidd highlighted that extension of the OBOR initiative to Central and South America would create security vulnerabilities for the United States likely to “compromise communication networks, and ultimately constrain our ability to work with our partners”. While the US had the opportunity to offer an attractive US-led alternative to China’s economic vision for the Indo-Pacific in form of The Trans-Pacific Partnership which it missed by withdrawing from it instead (Gale & Shearer, 2018).

The US and China have also engaged in levying tariffs and counter-tariffs upon each other in the recent past. American president Donald Trump has even gone to the extent of blaming China for the COVID-19 pandemic, accusing it of influencing WHO on that matter. He has accused China of ‘secrecy, deception and cover-up’ (Donald Trump blames China’s ‘secrecy, deception and cover-up’ for Covid-19, 2020).

#### **IV. THE WAY BEYOND**

Ambassador Alice Wells pushed back against concerns that China might object to the revival of QUAD and its concept, saying that:

I think it’s hard to see a meeting of diplomats from four countries as a plan to contain China. I think it’s a natural expression and convergence of interests between democratic countries in the Indo-Pacific region and it’s a natural stepping stone from the very productive trilateral conversations, exercises and cooperation that we’ve seen between India, Japan and the United States. (Gale & Shearer, 2018, p. 33)

One of the arguments made by the Chinese against the QUAD is that it would lessen the importance of ASEAN.

However, it has been seen that the majority of those who emphasise the QUAD's challenge to ASEAN and ASEAN-centred architecture are often citizens of non-ASEAN states (Thu, 2018).

A survey shows that the view that QUAD would challenge or sideline ASEAN certainly isn't the prevalent view among ASEAN member states:

The largest proportion of respondents (44%) thought that the QUAD complements existing regional security frameworks, and there was only a 3 percentage point difference between all respondents and the ASEAN-only respondents. Similar response rate was found (below 20%) of those who thought that it challenges the framework and those who thought it sidelines the framework, and 12% thought that it doesn't affect the framework at all. (Thu, 2018, p. 15)

While China's view of QUAD's impact on ASEAN is known, it is also pertinent to know ASEAN States' view on how China and QUAD would get along.

Thirty six percent of ASEAN citizens thought that the QUAD is an 'anti-China bulwark' but that it's necessary, while 21% thought it was dangerous. Cumulatively, 57% of respondents associated the QUAD with the need to balance China. Twenty-eight persons thought that it shouldn't be seen that way, and 15% thought that the QUAD isn't an 'anti-China bulwark' but that it projects as such. Fifty-six percent of respondents thought that the QUAD could partially limit or slow China's economic and strategic dominance, while 27% thought that it wouldn't be able to stop China's economic and strategic dominance. However, in the perception of the respondents, the future of the QUAD remains tied to China's behaviour. One-third of respondents thought that the QUAD's prospects were linked to how assertive/aggressive China is in general. The second most popular answer was also about China's aggression, but specifically in the maritime domain. (Thu, 2018, p. 19-20)

Although a final call is yet to be taken, it has been reported that India is considering including Australia in the next edition of the Malabar naval exercise (India to invite Australia to Malabar naval exercise, Quad stands up to China, 2020).

## **V. CONCLUSION**

China was able to mitigate QUAD's influence back in 2008 because of its somewhat lukewarm relations with India and ambivalent relations with Australia. A decade later, however, both

these countries are facing an authoritarian and dominating China. Both these countries seem to be in no mood to be complicit and have proceeded against China in their own ways.

With all the four countries in QUAD under visible threat from China, it wouldn't be incorrect to call this formation somewhat 'natural'. The QUAD is being labelled as an 'Arc of Democracy' too (Heydarian, 2020).

As the balance of power shifts and the regional order comes under strain, the four countries' increasingly convergent interests may actually help the QUAD gain importance and relevance in the contemporary world (Gale & Shearer, 2018).

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