

## **Quad 3.0: Japan, Indo-Pacific and Minilateralism**

Kei KOGA

### <Abstract>

Japan under the first and second Abe administration in 2006–07 and 2012–20, respectively, played a pivotal leading role in creating and institutionalising the Quad. While Japan took on a more supportive role in the post-Abe administrations, there are unique roles that Japan could still play in coordinating and shaping the strategic role of the Quad, such as configuring its institutional relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

### <Content Body>

The Australia–India–Japan–United States consultation group, the so-called “Quad”, has been one of the most important minilateral frameworks that Japan has engaged since the early 2000s.<sup>1</sup> As the US–China strategic competition intensifies, the Quad has been rapidly institutionalised as evident in two summit meetings that were held in March and September 2021, and in the establishment of several working groups that focus on potentially vital strategic fields, such as climate crisis, the COVID-19, emerging and critical technologies, infrastructure and cyber security. The Quad members also reached out to other states for policy coordination in specific issue areas, such as the two counter-COVID-19 meetings with external states, namely Brazil, Israel, New Zealand, South Korea and Vietnam—the so-called “Quad Plus”.

Nevertheless, the institutionalisation processes of the Quad have never been straightforward. The origin of the grouping derives from the “core group” of four democratic states—Australia, India, Japan, and the United States—which coordinated their humanitarian assistance/ disaster relief (HA/DR) operations in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. As the military coordination was successful, in 2007, the four states considered a possibility of establishing a quadrilateral dialogue, which, however, was not realised due to the differing security perspectives among the four. Later in 2017, when China was seen as more capable and assertive in a new geographical concept—the Indo-Pacific—the Quad was quietly revived as the so-called “Quad 2.0”.

The Quad subsequently started to move into a more structured format after the inauguration of Joe Biden as US president in 2021; the format is essentially different from that of Quad 2.0, evolving into Quad 3.0. Several questions arise—What role has Japan played in the institutional development of the Quad? What are the strategic objectives that Japan has expected from the Quad? How has Japan’s policy towards the Quad evolved over time?

I argue that Japan under the first and second Abe administration in 2006–07 and 2012–20, respectively, played a pivotal leading role in creating and institutionalising the Quad. While Japan

---

Kei KOGA is Assistant Professor at the Public Policy and Global Affairs Programme in School of Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

<sup>1</sup> Despite the growing volume of literature, in this article, minilateralism refers to a small interstate grouping (consisting of three to five member states) that aim to facilitate either a single- or multifunctional cooperation. For other definitions, see Bhubhinder Singh and Sarah Teo, “Introduction: Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific”, in *Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific*, ed Bhubhinder Singh and Sarah Teo, Oxon and New York, Routledge, 2020, pp. 1–12; Moises Naim, “Minilateralism”, *Foreign Policy*, 21 June 2009, <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/06/21/minilateralism/>> (accessed 27 February 2022).

took on a more supportive role in the post-Abe administrations because of a plethora of immediate domestic issues—the COVID-19 pandemic confusion, the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and leadership transitions—there are unique roles that Japan could still play in coordinating and shaping the strategic role of the Quad, such as configuring its institutional relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

This article is structured into four parts. The first part discusses the origin and the development of the Quad from 2004 to 2007, and the second examines the relationship between Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy and Quad 2.0 from 2016. The third section analyses the rapid institutionalisation of the Quad from 2020 onwards—Quad 3.0—and Japan's evolving role in the Quad. The fourth briefly provide the future prospects of Japan's policy towards the Quad, and challenges that Japan and the Quad member states need to tackle.

## <H1>Origin and Collapse of Quad 1.0

The prototype of the Quad was born in December 2004 when Japan, the United States, Australia and India, as the “core group”, coordinated their HA/DR operations in the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami. Strong bilateral security linkages were forged between Japan and the United States, and between Australia and the United States as they were long-standing treaty allies. However, their relations with India were relatively weak because India was not a US ally and it maintained strategic autonomy. Furthermore, as India conducted nuclear tests in 1998, the international community, including Japan, the United States and Australia, condemned such an act, and Japan and the United States even imposed economic sanctions on India. From the early 2000s, Japanese and US relationships with India gradually improved on the basis of their interests to strengthen economic cooperation, but the formulation of the core group had not given sufficient traction for its institutionalisation.

However, Japan began to recognise the potential of strategic ties among Japan, the United States, Australia and India in shaping the regional balance of power in a broader Asia in the future. Indeed, Japan adopted a bilateral approach to nurture political and security partnerships with Australia and India from the early 2000s, given that Australia gradually nurtured security ties with Japan through the United States, and that India shared democratic values and did not have historical antagonism with Japan.<sup>2</sup> These strategic manoeuvres were conducted in the context of China's increasing economic and military capabilities in East Asia, and the deterioration of Japan–China relations.

This is well illustrated by such incidents as Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's annual visits to Yasukuni Shrine from 2001 to 2006 that resulted in massive anti-Japanese demonstrations in China. Also, China's maritime activities in the disputed East China Sea maritime borders became more visible as China conducted fait accompli natural resource extraction from 2004. As such, Japan became increasingly concerned about China's future behaviour.

Against this backdrop, Japan made significant strategic steps to formulate the Quad in 2006–7. While Japan maintained the traditional line of the Japanese foreign policy strategy—upholding and strengthening the US–Japan alliance—Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe sought for the creation of a democratic coalition, expressing his desire to facilitate democratisation in a broader Asia and conduct strategic dialogues at the summit level with countries that shared fundamental rights,

---

<sup>2</sup> Shinzo Abe, “‘Jiyu de hirakareta indo-taiheiyo’ ni miru senryakuteki shiko” (Strategic Thinking of “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”), *Gaiko Forum*, no. 65, 2021, pp. 95–96.

particularly Australia and India.<sup>3</sup> This proposal was soon followed up by Foreign Minister Taro Aso who launched his foreign policy vision, the “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity”, in November 2006 to nurture the democratic coalition and promote market economy in the geographic areas between Japan and Europe.

At the same time, Japan attempted to transform its bilateral security partnerships into a minilateral format. Most notably, Japan’s trilateral relations with the United States and Australia were already enhanced by the upgrading of the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue to the ministerial level in March 2006; and bilaterally, Japan and Australia strengthened their security ties by issuing the Japan–Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation in March 2007, although the focus was primarily on non-traditional security issues. In addition, Abe delivered a historic speech titled “Confluence of the Two Seas” at the Indian Parliament in August 2007 to upgrade strategic ties with India, aiming to create a strategic network with the United States and Australia.

With a new strategic vision and developments of Japan’s bilateral and trilateral cooperation with the United States, Australia and India, the Abe administration pushed forward the establishment of Quadrilateral Security Dialogue—Quad 1.0. When US Vice President Dick Cheney visited Japan in February 2007, Abe discussed to enhance the Japan–Australia–US relations and expressed his desire to organise the Quadrilateral Dialogue by inviting India.<sup>4</sup> Cheney agreed and discussed the idea with Australian Prime Minister John Howard bilaterally; Howard agreed in principle with the idea although he also showed cautiousness towards materialising it.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, while all the four members did not necessarily share similar threat perception, Japan and the United States pushed to gain diplomatic traction to promote strategic cooperation among the four states.

The steady cooperation culminated in the actual Quad cooperation in 2007. In May 2007, officials from Japan, Australia, India and the United States at the assistant-secretary level met at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Manila. The meeting was “exploratory” and informal without any preset agendas, but signalled the foremost step for developing the Quad framework. While the US–India annual joint military exercise in April, Malabar, invited Japan for the first time and conducted a joint military exercise in the Western Pacific, in September 2007, another Malabar exercise, Malabar-2007-2, expanded its participation by including Japan, Australia, and Singapore, and thus brought the Quad member-states together militarily for the first time.

However, the diplomatic momentum was suddenly lost in 2008, mainly because of China’s concerns about the grouping and the change in Australia’s leadership. After the Quad meeting on the sidelines of the ARF in 2007, China quickly responded by sending a “démarche” to Japan, the United States, Australia and India to question the purpose of the Quad, showing its concern about the Quad’s potential encirclement of China. Although this action did not take immediate effect, the four states had registered China’s concern in their diplomatic calculation. When Kevin Rudd assumed the Australian prime ministership in 2007, he perceived Japan’s ambition to counter China and took into serious consideration China’s concern, hence resulting in Australia’s decision in 2008 to disengage from the Quad activities.<sup>6</sup> Since the United States and India showed implicit diplomatic hesitation in

---

<sup>3</sup> “Dai 165kai kokkai Shugi-in Honkaigi dai 3 gou Heisei18nen9gatsu29nichi” (165th Diet—Lower House, Plenary Session, no. 3, September 29, 2006), 29 September 2006, <<https://kokkai.ndl.go.jp/#/detail?minId=116505254X00320060929>> (accessed 27 February 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Cheini beikokufukudaitoryo no rajitsu” (Vice President Cheney’s Visit to Japan), 22 February 2007, <[https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/usa/visit/dc\\_0702/kaidan\\_g.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/usa/visit/dc_0702/kaidan_g.html)> (accessed xx month 20xx).

<sup>5</sup> Jeff Smith, “The Quad 2.0: A Foundation for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific”, The Heritage Foundation Backgrounder, 6 July 2020.

<sup>6</sup> “Joint Press Conference with Chinese Foreign Minister”, Trove, 5 February 2008, <[https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/awa/20090917143531/http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/transcripts/2008/080205\\_jpc.html](https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/awa/20090917143531/http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/transcripts/2008/080205_jpc.html)> (accessed 27 February 2022); Kevin Rudd, “The Convenient Rewriting of the History of the

institutionalising the Quad, and also Abe, who played a leading role in the Quad, suddenly handed in his resignation, the Quad idea dissipated in 2008.<sup>7</sup>

### <H1>Emergence of Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific and Quad 2.0

After the demise of Quad 1.0, the idea of such a grouping was put on the back burner in Japan's foreign policy agenda until 2012. From 2006 to 2012, Japan underwent frequent leadership changes and had six prime ministers. During this period, each prime minister was at the helm for about only one year which was deemed too short to implement his own diplomatic vision—Yukio Hatoyama's "East Asian community" was a case in point. Furthermore, Japan experienced a devastating natural disaster—the Great East Japan Earthquake—in March 2011, and the collapse of the nuclear plants in Fukushima led to nuclear crises, which made Japan preoccupied with its domestic disaster relief.

That said, the idea of Quad re-emerged after Abe regained the prime minister post in December 2012. Shortly before his inauguration, Abe published an op-ed, "Asia's Democratic Security Diamond", expressing his long-standing political desire to formulate a Japan–India–Australia–United States coalition in the Indo-Pacific in order to counter China's assertive behaviour in the maritime domain, and to ensure the freedom of navigation and overflight.<sup>8</sup> By 2012, Southeast Asian states faced China's growing maritime presence in the South China Sea, and Japan struggled to handle China's increasingly assertive behaviour near the Senkaku Islands, which China also claimed as its own as manifested in these events—the 2010 clash between a Chinese fishery boat and Japanese coastguard ships, and the 2012 dispute over Japan's "nationalisation" of the Senkaku Islands.

To be sure, Abe wrote the op-ed when his political party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), was not in power, and thus he was able to freely and frankly express his strategic ambition. However, after he became prime minister, he did not immediately advocate for the establishment of the Quad. Rather, he concentrated on strengthening Japan's bilateral and trilateral ties with the United States, Australia and India, so that the multilateralisation of those strategic networks could be nurtured in the future. Also, such precaution derived from the experience of failure of Quad 1.0, which was caused by a rapid institutionalisation without consensus.

Four years into Abe's second term after the inauguration of his administration in 2012, the strategic environment in East Asia had changed significantly. The Japanese government was increasingly concerned about China's continued assertive behaviour, and was also alarmed by two international events that were seen as China's explicit challenge against the existing international order.<sup>9</sup>

One is the growing influence of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Given that the BRI imposed fewer socio-economic conditions for development assistance, regional states in the Indo-

---

'Quad"', *Nikkei Asia*, 26 March 2019, <<https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/The-Convenient-Rewriting-of-the-History-of-the-Quad>> (accessed 27 February 2022).

<sup>7</sup> Tanvi Madan, "The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of the 'QUAD'", *War on the Rocks*, 16 November 2017; Daniel Flitton, "Who Really Killed the Quad 1.0?", *The Interpreter*, 2 June 2020, <<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/who-really-killed-quad-10>> (accessed xx month 20xx).

<sup>8</sup> Shinzo Abe, "Asia's Democratic Security Diamond", Project Syndicate, 27 December 2012, <<https://www.project-syndicate.org/onpoint/a-strategic-alliance-for-japan-and-india-by-shinzo-abe>> (accessed xx month 20xx).

<sup>9</sup> Kei Koga, "Japan's 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' Strategy: Tokyo's Tactical Hedging and the Implications for ASEAN", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2019, pp. 286–313; Kei Koga, "Japan's 'Indo-Pacific' Question: Countering China or Shaping a New Regional Order?", *International Affairs*, vol. 96, no. 1, 2020, pp. 49–73.

Pacific region, including Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Maldives, were attracted to the initiative. Since China's development standards often do not meet international standards of environmental protection, financial sustainability and labour rights, the shortcoming has raised international concerns. Japan losing its bid for the Jakarta–Bandung high-speed railway to China in 2015 was a wake-up call to Japan.

The other is China's growing maritime assertiveness. Given that China's encroachment continued, as evident in the 2012 Scarborough incident, in which China effectively controlled the shoal by expelling the Philippines, the Philippines filed its South China Sea case to the arbitration tribunal under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 2013. Eventually, the arbitral award ruled overwhelmingly in favour of the Philippines' claims in 2016. However, China refused to recognise the tribunal ruling, and Japan viewed China's rebuff as a clear challenge against the existing international rules and norms.<sup>10</sup>

In this context, Japan launched its "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" (FOIP) in 2016. The concept was explained in Abe's speech at the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development held in Kenya. The speech envisioned the important economic and security connectivity between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, as well as between Asia and Africa. Given the economic potential of Africa, and Asia's economic and political success, Abe identified that the Asia–Africa connection should be enhanced. To realise such a connectivity, he emphasized the importance of the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), the rule of law, freedom, the market economy, prosperity and the non-use of force or coercion. Although Abe himself did not use the term "Free and Open Indo-Pacific", the statement has become the crux of Japan's FOIP concept.

The primary objective of Japan's FOIP is to maintain and enhance a rules-based international order in the Indo-Pacific region based on the existing international order. To Japan, the existing order—constructed largely by the United States post-World War II—had strategically and economically benefited post-war Japan, giving it economic prosperity and strategic stability in Northeast Asia. This has been the persisting strategic view since the post-Cold War era when the United States became the sole superpower; nevertheless, in Japanese view, China's rise was a precarious, destabilising factor to such an order. In this sense, Japan began to more clearly express its strategic concern over China, and pertaining to the FOIP concept, it emphasised the importance of cooperation with regional states, particularly the United States, Australia and India.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the initial vague statements, the FOIP concept began to take shape following interactions of the allies and partners. Most notably, at the 2017 bilateral summit meeting, Japan and the United States agreed on three principles in pursuing the FOIP: (i) promotion and establishment of fundamental values (rule of law, freedom of navigation, etc.); (ii) pursuit of economic prosperity (improvement of connectivity, etc.); and (iii) commitment for peace and stability (capacity-building on maritime law enforcement, etc.). Both also highlighted that the FOIP did not exclude any state that share the same vision, but this also inferred that they would be unwilling, or at least hesitant, to cooperate with those that disagreed with the principles. Following the Japan–US bilateral dialogue,

---

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China on the Award of 12 July 2016 of the Arbitral Tribunal in the South China Sea Arbitration Established at the Request of the Republic of the Philippines", 12 July 2016, <[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/2649\\_665393/201607/t20160712\\_679470.html#:~:text=Wit h%20regard%20to%20the%20award,Republic%20of%20China%20solemnly%20declares](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/201607/t20160712_679470.html#:~:text=Wit h%20regard%20to%20the%20award,Republic%20of%20China%20solemnly%20declares)> (27 February 2022).

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Defence of Japan, "National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2014 and Beyond", 17 December 2013,

<[https://warp.da.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/11591426/www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2014/pdf/2013\\_1217\\_e2.pdf](https://warp.da.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/11591426/www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2014/pdf/2013_1217_e2.pdf)> (accessed 27 February 2022); Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Gaiko Seisho 2016" (Diplomatic Bluebook 2016), 2016, <[https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/bluebook/2017/html/chapter1\\_02.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/bluebook/2017/html/chapter1_02.html)> (accessed 27 February 2022).

senior officials from Japan, Australia, India and the United States convened at a meeting in the Philippines on 12 November 2017 to discuss ways of maintaining a free and open order in the Indo-Pacific region, which was considered the resurrection of the Quad—Quad 2.0.

Obviously, the initial reactions from the Quad states were not necessarily congruent, requiring further policy coordination by understanding member states' strategic position of the day. For example, at the first meeting of Quad 2.0, Japan, the United States and Australia agreed to maintain the “rules-based order” in the Indo-Pacific region, but India was cautious about the notion, emphasising the importance of realising and shaping “a free, open, prosperous and *inclusive* Indo-Pacific region” in the future.<sup>12</sup> Also, Japan, the United States and Australia explicitly expressed their willingness to continue with the quadrilateral dialogue, while India was silent about its format and continuity. Additionally, the term “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” was shared between the United States and Japan, whereas Australia and India did not use the same terminology. Some of these differences, such as the terminology relating to the Indo-Pacific principles, were relatively easy to coordinate, but others, such as the quadrilateral military cooperation, required more time for further coordination.

In this sense, while Quad 2.0 could potentially become a core minilateral framework in the Indo-Pacific region for realising the FOIP, its future remained uncertain as meetings were held essentially on an ad-hoc basis. Therefore, due to the member states' diverging national interests, there is a palpable likelihood that some members would defect.

### <H1>From Quad 2.0 to Quad 3.0

The Quad's institutional development has accelerated since 2020, moving from a mere ad-hoc consultation to a more structured, institutionalised grouping. This indicates that the Quad has evolved from Quad 2.0 to Quad 3.0. There are three key characteristics that differentiate Quad 2.0 from Quad 3.0.

First, the Quad has become significantly structured. As indicated in Table 1, back-to-back meetings were held with other regional forums, such as East Asia Summit and Shangri-La dialogue, from 2017 to 2019. In September 2019, the first Foreign Ministers' meeting was held in succession the UN General Assembly, but no joint statement was issued. The meeting remained low-key for the fact that Australia and India did not even provide any meeting information in their foreign ministries' websites. However, the senior official meetings, despite on an ad hoc basis, were held regularly from 2017, culminating a significant progress from 2020.

The first progress noticed was diplomatic autonomy, by which the meeting started to be held independently. While the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic had caused most of the diplomatic interaction to turn online, in October 2020, Japan hosted a face-to-face foreign ministers' meeting in Tokyo, and subsequently in September 2021, the United States hosted the second Quad summit in Washington, DC. The second progress was the officially-declared regularisation of senior official, foreign ministers and summit meetings, which previously were held on the ad hoc basis. This ensured regular interactions among the four members. The third progress was the issuance of joint statements, which was unprecedented before 2021, but became possible at summit-level meetings in 2021 and at a

---

<sup>12</sup> *Emphasis* added. See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Japan–U.S. Working Lunch and Japan–U.S. Summit Meeting”, 6 November 2017, <[https://www.mofa.go.jp/na/na1/us/page4e\\_000699.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/na/na1/us/page4e_000699.html)> (accessed 27 February 2022); Ministry of External Affairs of India, “India–Australia–Japan–US Consultations on Indo-Pacific”, 12 November 2017, <[https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29110/IndiaAustraliaJapanUS\\_Consultations\\_on\\_IndoPacific\\_November\\_12\\_2017](https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29110/IndiaAustraliaJapanUS_Consultations_on_IndoPacific_November_12_2017)> (accessed 27 February 2022).

foreign ministers meeting in 2022. In this sense, the steady institutionalisation of the Quad has become more visible than before.

Table 1. Institutionalisation of the Quad from 2017 to 2022

	Date	Venue	Level	Back-to-Back
1	12 Nov 2017	Philippines	Senior Official	East Asia Summit (SOM)
2	7 June 2018	Singapore	Senior Official	Shangri-La Dialogue
3	15 Nov 2018	Singapore	Senior Official	East Asia Summit (SOM)
4	31 May 2019	Thailand	Senior Official	East Asia Summit (SOM)
5	26 Sep 2019	United States	Foreign Ministers	UN General Assembly
6	4 Nov 2019	Thailand	Senior Official	East Asia Summit (SOM)
7	25 Sep 2020	Virtual	Senior Official	-
8	6 Oct 2020	Japan	Foreign Ministers	Independent
9	18 Dec 2020	Virtual	Senior Official	-
10	18 Feb 2021	Virtual	Foreign Ministers	-
11	12 Mar 2021	Virtual	Summit	-
12	12 Aug 2021	Virtual	Senior Official	-
13	24 Sep 2021	United States	Summit	Independent
14	11 Feb 2022	Australia	Foreign Ministers	Independent

Source: Compiled by author.

Second, the Quad has had a more focused areas of cooperation. In 2017, the Quad was only a consultation group, and members were not necessarily certain about whether there were future meetings in the pipeline. The meeting agenda was not clearly set, instead the discussions were on broader strategic concepts, such as “free and open international order”, “free and open Indo-Pacific” and “free open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific”.<sup>13</sup> Also, while Japan, the United States and Australia indicated their willingness to continue the discussion, India remained uncertain about the future of the Quad.

From the second to the seventh meeting, the four members consolidated their understanding of “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” and emphasised their shared principles, such as the support for ASEAN centrality and unity; however the issue areas that each member emphasised differed, resulting in a broad range of issues, such as development and connectivity, digital infrastructure, good governance, democratic values, maritime security, proliferation, supply chains and cyber security, being discussed. The Quad’s focus changed and became clearer at the first summit in February 2021

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of External Affairs of India, “India–Australia–Japan–US Consultations on Indo-Pacific”, 12 November 2017; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Australia–India–Japan–US Consultations on the Indo-Pacific”, 12 November 2017, <[https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e\\_001789.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_001789.html)> (accessed 27 February 2022); US Department of State, “Australia–India–Japan–US Consultations on the Indo-Pacific”, 12 November 2017, <<https://2017-2021.state.gov/australia-india-japan-u-s-consultations-on-the-indo-pacific/index.html>> (accessed 27 February 2022); Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia, “Australia–India–Japan–United States Consultations on the Indo-Pacific”, 12 November 2017, <<https://www.dfat.gov.au/news/media/Pages/aus-india-japan-us-consultations-on-the-indo-pacific>> (accessed 27 February 2022).

with the creation of three working groups, namely COVID-19 countermeasures, emerging and critical technology, and climate crisis. Even though the second summit in September 2021 expanded the areas of cooperation and coordination from three to seven areas, adding infrastructure, people-to-people exchange and education, cyber security and space, their strategic foci have become much clearer.

Third, the Quad has become a broader strategic grouping rather than a military-focused coalition. Given that the Quad's origin stems from the core group in 2004, an ad hoc military cooperation in HA/DR, it was natural to observe how the member states would promote military cooperation. In fact, the Malabar annual military exercise between India and the United States had evolved from a bilateral to trilateral format in 2015 by formally including Japan. Although India rejected Australia's request several times, Australia started to participate from 2020. As the Malabar exercise includes anti-submarine warfare drills that are useful to check and deter external threats in the Indo-Pacific, its strategic implication became significant.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, the military cooperation exists in parallel with the Quad meetings and there was no formal linkage between the two. Although future linkage could be forged, depending on the strategic circumstance, the Quad's strategic objective has been evolving into rules-making and order-building in the Indo-Pacific. While the Quad members support the existing rules and norms, such as the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), that are recognised by a majority of states, they also attempt to coordinate their policies in emerging areas, such as digital infrastructure and environment, which require the creation of new rules.

With these three institutional developments, Quad 3.0 has assumed two important diplomatic functions—external signalling and internal coordination. On external signalling, the Quad can send a stronger diplomatic signal to the international community with its agenda-setting power in the Indo-Pacific region. This informal agenda-setting power is attained because these four regional powers have sufficient material capabilities and diplomatic influence in shaping regional rules and norms. Obviously, since the Quad still carries political connotation of “anti-China”, not all regional states are willing to formally cooperate with the group; however, as the so-called “Quad-Plus” meetings for the COVID-19 countermeasures were held in March and May 2020 by inviting external states, such as South Korea and Vietnam, some states would likely participate for the betterment of policy coordination and rules-making in a particular issue area.<sup>15</sup> While Japan and other Quad members have not specified their preference of states to be included in the Quad-Plus, it remains a fluid and flexible institutional format, by which any state that shares similar strategic concerns can join. For now, as the Quad has created focal issue areas, the group can serve as a useful tool to lead international discussions on rules-making and policy coordination with like-minded states.

On internal coordination, the Quad has become a useful forum for information-sharing and policy coordination. The ad hoc characteristics of Quad 2.0 was useful for information-sharing and flexible arrangement, but it also faced challenges of members' defection, which could have resulted in institutional breakdown like Quad 1.0. However, the regularisation of various levels of diplomatic interactions, including the summit level, ensures the institutional continuity and stable expectations in a relative term. As such, longer-term policy planning and coordination become possible, beyond merely information-sharing. Defence cooperation among the four members that have divergent national interest and strategic perspectives would usually be difficult. However, Quad 3.0 presents the

---

<sup>14</sup> “First Phase of Annual Maritime Exercise Malabar 2021 Commences”, *Naval Technology*, 27 August 2021, <<https://www.naval-technology.com/news/maritime-exercise-malabar-2021-commences/>> (accessed 27 February 2022).

<sup>15</sup> Kei Koga, “Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision under Suga: Transition and Future Challenges in Southeast Asia”, *East Asian Policy*, vol. 13, no. 3, July/September 2021, pp. 89–93; Kei Koga, “Nurturing the ‘Quad Plus’ Formula: Institutional Perspective of Japan's FOIP”, in *Quad Plus and Indo-Pacific: The Changing Profile of International Relations*, ed Jagannath Panda and Ernest Gunasekara-Rockwell, Oxon and New York, Routledge, 2022.

possibility to not only hold joint military exercises, such as Malabar, but also facilitate defence technology transfers.<sup>16</sup>

With rapid institutional evolution from 2020, the question arises as to why China was largely unsuccessful in driving a wedge between Japan, Australia, India and the United States as it did in 2007. The simple answer is: the four have begun to share more similar threat perceptions towards China. The perception gap is a source for external actors to drive a wedge, and this was effectively applied in 2007 when China's deep concerns about Quad 1.0 divided the Quad members. Indeed, China seemingly expected the gap as Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, in 2018, dismissed the grouping as one of the "headline-grabbing ideas" that "may get some attention, but soon will dissipate".<sup>17</sup> When the Quad did not disappear, China raised its serious concerns and rebuked it as US attempts to establish an "Indo-Pacific NATO" that would destabilise regional security, according to *South China Morning Post* on 13 October 2020.

Nevertheless, the institutional breakdown did not occur in 2020 as each of the Quad members has perceived more acute threats from China. Japan has been concerned about China's fait accompli strategy to unilaterally extract natural resources in the East China Sea and steadily increase its maritime presence near the Senkakus. India had dealt with land border disputes more frequently as evident in the military standoff at a disputed border in Doklam with China in 2017, and military skirmishes in Ladakh in 2020 and 2021. Australia has begun to shift its strategic posture to balance against China, particularly since 2017 when then Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull raised the issue of China's foreign interference, resulting in the adoption of foreign interference laws in 2018 while strengthening its strategic ties with the United States. The United States under the Trump administration explicitly declared its firmer stance against China, which was defined as a revisionist power in the 2017 National Security Strategy, and imposed tough measures on China's economic practices and technological policies from 2018—the so-called "trade war" and "tech war".

Further, China's assertive behaviour persisted in the Indo-Pacific region. For example, while regional states were preoccupied with developing countermeasures in their fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, China continued to send energy exploration survey ships and conducted large-scale military exercises, acutely alarming the regional states.<sup>18</sup> With China's increasing military and economic capabilities, and diplomatic influence in the region through such strategic visions as the BRI, Chinese assertive actions were grave enough to justify that its behaviour in the Indo-Pacific had posed threats. This is the critical trigger of the Quad's elevation into a more institutionalised form, Quad 3.0.

---

<sup>16</sup> Currently, Japan has agreements regarding defence technology transfer with the United States (1983), Australia (2014) and India (2015). While Japan and the United States have a long history of such cooperation between them, Japan and India started recently in 2018 joint research on the development of the unmanned ground vehicle (UGV) and robotics, whereas Japan and Australia conducted a joint research project from 2015 to 2019 which was renewed in 2021 on the automation of unmanned vehicle as well as hydrodynamic and hydroacoustic performance of ships and vessels. Given the increasing importance of defence technology, including artificial intelligence, this will be an area of cooperation that Quad members could enhance in the future. See Ministry of Defence of Japan, "Boei Hakusho" (Defence White Paper), 2021, <<https://www.mod.go.jp/j/publication/wp/wp2021/html/n420503000.html>> (accessed 27 February 2022).

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Foreign Minister Wang Yi Meets the Press", 9 March 2018, <[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/zjyh\\_665391/201803/t20180309\\_678665.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zjyh_665391/201803/t20180309_678665.html)> (accessed 27 February 2022).

<sup>18</sup> Ian Storey, "The South China Sea Dispute in 2020–2021", *ISEAS Perspective*, no. 97, 2020, <[https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ISEAS\\_Perspective\\_2020\\_97.pdf](https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ISEAS_Perspective_2020_97.pdf)> (accessed 27 February 2022).

### <H1>Japan and Quad 3.0

By 2021, the Quad has become an indispensable tool to realise its FOIP vision. Japan aims to shape a rules-based regional order in the Indo-Pacific through supporting Quad's institutional development, facilitating policy coordination among the member states, and exploring areas of cooperation with the member states and beyond. At the same time, as the Quad evolves, Japan's diplomatic role towards the Quad has also changed. Unlike Abe's strong political desire to create the Quad, Japan's diplomatic enthusiasm towards the Quad gradually dissipates. While this does not imply that Japan's strategic posture has changed, Japan's leadership role in the Quad is not as visible as it used to be. There are three explanations.

First, Japan's diplomacy towards China slightly shifted from 2018 to 2019. While the United States began to exert greater diplomatic and economic pressures on China from 2017, Japan maintained the possibility of re-engagement with China. Such a diplomatic manoeuvre could be alluded to Abe's 2017 speech delivered at the International Conference, "The Future of Asia", stating Japan's possibility of cooperation with China in the field of infrastructure development premised on openness, transparent and fair procurement, economic viability and financial soundness. Japan reiterated these four conditions that potential collaboration should build on, thus resulting in the bilateral summit meetings between Abe and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, and between Abe and Chinese President Xi Jinping in May and October 2018, respectively.

This also led to the conclusion of the G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment in July 2019 which China also agreed with. As China agreed, in principle, with Japan's infrastructure conditions, Japan was ready to engage China and planned to hold a bilateral summit in April 2020, which was indefinitely postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the help of India's diplomatic posture to nurture a cooperative climate towards China around 2018 as evident in the China-India Summit at Wuhan and Chennai in 2018 and 2019, such positive prospect between Japan and China contributed to a weakening of Japan's incentive to accelerate the Quad's institutionalisation process.

Second, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted Japan's foreign policy activities. In the face of the confusing management of the cruise ship calling at Yokohama, *Diamond Princess*, which had 713 COVID-infected passengers in January 2020 and at least 14 deaths, the Japanese government failed to provide clear guidelines to counter COVID-19. The Abe administration distributed reusable cloth masks to the Japanese public, but there was a significant delay and by the time of distribution, surgical masks were already commercially available. In addition, increasing uncertainty about the 2020 Tokyo Olympics exacerbated the government's indecision, thus affecting public support for the Abe administration.

Indeed, according to an NHK poll on 12 January 2021, Abe's disapproval rating increased to over 45% from April 2020, while the approval rating stagnated around 36% until Abe's resignation in September. Suga Yoshihide, who was Chief Cabinet Secretary in the Abe administration and took over Japan's prime ministership, was also preoccupied with the COVID-19 and the Tokyo Olympics. Further, Suga miscalculated the public perception, particularly that of the "go-to-travel" campaign which encouraged domestic travels among Japanese to revitalise economy because the infection numbers increased significantly after the campaign. Eventually, the Suga administration faced three COVID-19 waves—(1) December 2020–January 2021, (2) April–June 2021 and (3) August–September 2021—thus casting a negative image of Suga. NHK poll conducted on 10 August 2021 indicates that while the approval rating remained relatively stable until April 2021, it suffered a significant drop from 44% in April 2021 to 29% in August 2021. The Japanese leaders, being preoccupied with these domestic problems, were unable to conduct proactive diplomacy.

Third, the United States has begun to play a strong leadership role in institutionalising the Quad. While Japan attempted to seek a possibility of engagement with China in 2018 and 2019, the United States emphasised the importance of the Quad in countering China. Under the Trump administration, State Secretary Mike Pompeo argued in his interview with Nikkei Asia on 6 October 2020 that “once [the four states have] institutionalized [the Quad], [the four] can begin to build out a true security framework” that could “counter the challenge that the Chinese Communist Party presents to [the four]”.

Such was the strategic enthusiasm that was carried over to the Biden administration, and in 2021, the United States organised two summits, and formally regularised ministerial and summit meetings. Although the Biden administration does not actively promote the role of the Quad in countering China as Pompeo did, its vision to maintain and enhance the free and open Indo-Pacific manifests its defense against challenges posed by China. In this context, Japan’s role in institutionalising the Quad was not as proactive as it used to be in 2012.

With the aforementioned three main factors, Japan has essentially become an active follower rather than a leader. The international and domestic factors, namely Japan’s own diplomatic posture towards China, its leadership transition and the intensification of the US–China strategic rivalry, led the United States to play a more active role, and the US diplomatic influence, backed with superior military and economic capabilities, enables the United States to take a lead in institutionalising the Quad.

Japan’s new administration led by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has indicated that Japan’s policy priority is its domestic economic reform, while it continues to emphasise the importance of diplomacy and security policy under the FOIP vision in cooperation with like-minded states, particularly the Quad members.<sup>19</sup> As such, Japan will likely actively support Quad 3.0. However, whether Japan can take an active role in further institutionalisation of the Quad remains uncertain as Kishida has yet to clarify his diplomatic vision on Japan’s role in the Quad.

At the same time, there is another important question as to whether the Quad would play a role in managing traditional security issues, such as territorial disputes and regional security contingency. The straightforward answer is “unlikely” as the Quad is moving towards a more rule-maintenance or rule-making institution in the Indo-Pacific; and despite its rapid functional evolution, the Quad plays a diplomatic rather than a military role, at least for now. As such, except for the concrete bilateral treaty allies, namely the US–Japan and US–Australia alliances, there is no formal obligation to provide military assistance in times of contingency among the Quad members. While it is possible for members to collectively condemn any aggressions made towards member states, they will not automatically provide military assistance in times of contingency.

Likewise, the Quad would likely remain militarily distant from the Taiwan issue. Admittedly, the United States, Japan and Australia have showed their willingness to play a role in maintaining stability in the Taiwan Straits and triggered domestic discussion on potential contingencies, as the US–Japan leaders’ statement in April 2021 and Australian Defence Minister Peter Dutton in November 2021 have indicated. However, India, being located in the middle of the Indian Ocean, would seem unlikely to play a stabilising military role in its contingency given its physical distance as well as its security interests. While the nature and characteristics of the Taiwan contingency, such as potential spillover effect to the wider region, and the direct and indirect diplomatic and military involvement of all four members cannot be ruled out, the Quad has yet to be the framework to manage

---

<sup>19</sup> Fumio Kishida, “Dai 205kai kokkai ni okeru Kishida Fumio naikaku soridaijin shoshinnyomei enzetsu” (Prime Minister Fumio Kishida’s Policy Speech at the 205th Diet), 8 October 2021, at <<https://kishida.gr.jp/activity/7868>> (accessed 27 February 2022).

such a specific traditional security issue. Therefore, such a strategic role would require another institutional evolution.

### <H1>Conclusion: Future Challenges for Japan's Role in Quad 3.0

Japan has taken an active role in promoting Quad 1.0 in 2007 and pushed forward the idea of democratic coalition with Australia, India and the United States to pursue its value-oriented diplomacy under the banner of the “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity”. Although the initial idea was thwarted, Quad 2.0 emerged in 2017. The path for such a resurrection was not straightforward, but Abe’s strong desire to formulate the so-called “Democratic Security Diamond” and its creation of a new diplomatic doctrine, FOIP, persuaded the United States to work together for nurturing the Quad framework. In Quad 3.0, Japan’s role is not as strong as it used to be, but Japan still plays an active supporter role for its institutionalisation that is led by the United States.

So, has Japan done with its work and will continue to assume merely a supporting role for the Quad in the future? Japan may continue to do so in that role, but there are still emerging challenges that Japan needs to address, namely elucidating the Quad’s relations with ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific and locating the “fundamental rights” in Japan’s FOIP vision.

ASEAN has been the core multilateral framework in East Asia in the post-Cold War era and actively engaged with regional states under its institutional principle, ASEAN centrality. With this principle, ASEAN aims to be the centre of regionalism in a region that it commits to. In 2019, ASEAN adopted the “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific” (AOIP), highlighting ASEAN centrality in the Indo-Pacific. This is generally a welcome assertion because AOIP indicates that Southeast Asia will not be a battleground for great power competition and will be able to resist great powers’ wedge strategy. However, this also creates a potential problem because Quad 3.0 now shapes its regional institutional architecture. Although the Quad members explicitly expressed their strong support for ASEAN centrality, there has yet to be any clear policy outlined on the distribution of institutional roles between them. Furthermore, the emergence of new minilateralism, such as AUKUS (the Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States trilateral security pact), would create additional complication. ASEAN member’s perspectives on these new groupings differ, and such divergent views can become a source of ASEAN divide, which can weaken ASEAN centrality and be exploited by external powers. Japan has been one of the staunch supporters for ASEAN, and thus, it should provide an initial conceptual map for institutional arrangements in the Indo-Pacific.

Another challenge is the management of the “fundamental rights”—the basic democratic values—in the Indo-Pacific. While advocating for democratic values and human rights protection, Japan has long taken a softer approach to non-democratic countries in Asia. This has resonated with ASEAN member states’ modus operandi although the United States and other Western partners tend to take additional stronger measures, such as economic sanctions, to change non-democratic behaviour. Given this, there were a differing approach to the fundamental rights among the Quad member states. However, this trend is now changing. While ASEAN engaged the junta leader after the Myanmar military coup in February 2021 and reached the “five-point consensus,” ASEAN decided not to invite the junta leader for ASEAN summit in October 2021 because the unclearness of the legitimate leader in Myanmar caused by a lack of implementation of the agreement by the junta.<sup>20</sup> Inevitably, ASEAN’s diplomatic manoeuvre deviated from its traditional approach as it defied a strict non-interference principle that ASEAN had protected. Politically, Japan’s FOIP vision and the Quad member’s posture are compatible with ASEAN’s action, but at the same time, this would facilitate

---

<sup>20</sup> Aaron Connelly, “Why ASEAN’s Rebuke of Myanmar’s Top General Matters”, *IJSS Analysis*, 21 October 2021, <<https://www.ijss.org/blogs/analysis/2021/10/why-aseans-rebuke-of-myanmars-top-general-matters>> (accessed 27 February 2022).

ASEAN's internal division, although the Quad strongly supports ASEAN centrality. Strategically, this could lead Myanmar to tilt towards China, which strictly adheres to the non-interference principle as a hedging policy. In this sense, Japan needs to clarify how to respond to the Myanmar issues through the Quad.

Despite the rapid evolution of the Quad that contributes to enhancing Japan's strategic options, there also emerge new option that Japan can take, the creation of the Australia-UK-US security partnership, AUKUS. As Japan-UK security cooperation has been steadily enhanced through its "global strategic partnership" particularly since 2013 when they concluded agreements on security of information as well as transfer of arms and military technologies, there is a possibility that Japan would create certain security linkages with AUKUS. Admittedly, such cooperation would likely be confined to an issues-based one such as emerging and critical technology and defence technology cooperation, because there are still domestically and internationally high political bars for Japan to cooperate over AUKUS's core cooperative area—nuclear submarine. Yet, this creates a potential institutional format for AUKUS, which can be "AUKUS-Plus" just as with the "Quad-Plus".

The Kishida administration is currently laying a political foundation for conducting its own domestic and foreign policy, and it would take time to consolidate its strategic posture toward the Indo-Pacific region, including the Quad. At the same time, the United States also issued its strategic document, "Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States", in February 2022, which highlighted the necessity of collective efforts for regional order-building. As Japan has begun to closely align with the United States and hence Japan's strategic posture towards China would possibly become tougher, even in the economic realm, Japan's strategic posture would possibly become a divisive factor in the region. Nevertheless, as the Russia-Ukraine war broke out in February 2022, which was caused by Russia's violation of international law, there is an urgent task for Japan to consider means to ensure the existing international order in the Indo-Pacific and beyond with the United States and regional states.

The Japanese government is expected to renew its National Security Strategy in 2022, which was last created under the Abe administration in 2013. Taking this as an opportunity, Japan should more clearly strategise its approach towards the Quad, ASEAN and the Indo-Pacific.