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QUAD: ORIGIN AND EVOLVING DYNAMICS

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Abstract

Quad is not a formal treaty, and for its members, it is not the only platform in Asia. It has brought like-minded maritime democracies together to create a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. It has responded to disaster crises and the pandemic more promptly than China's aggressive moves in the Indo-Pacific region. This article aims to understand the origin of 'the Quad' referred to as Quad 1.0 and its failure in 2007 and re-emergence of it as Quad 2.0. Quad 2.0 is further divided into the pre-pandemic Quad 2.1 and pandemic onset Quad 2.2. This article articulates the trajectory that Quad has traversed to reach Summit level meetings and its pursued agenda. The latest development in this arena is forming a trilateral agreement between Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom (AUKUS). This article questions the role of Quad in view of the formation of AUKUS and draw on its implications. It concludes that Quad has faltered in answering the security concern, paving the way for AUKUS. Quad's role is likely to turn towards a developmental paradigm of 'productive global public good'. In the long run, this will help create an equitable cohesive region and realize the ambition of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

Keywords: Formal treaty, developmental paradigm, security

Introduction

As nations came to realize the vulnerability of the Indo-Pacific region, the Indo-Pacific construct gained strong momentum. Over time, the overarching objective

of ensuring shared prosperity by securitizing the maritime domain and gaining equitability by economic integration through the understanding and incorporation of differing perspectives and strategic objectives has established itself. Deliberations on these lines firmed up in the form of “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP), which calls for a rule-based global order establishing the Indo-Pacific region’s undeniable geopolitical and geo-economic influence. Quad is one such mechanism.

As is often the case, a need for a framework of an agreement with a vision to potentially build an institution is the order of the day. In this region, it looked towards a security and economic architecture in which it was a predetermined conclusion that free and open in security parlance will mean that nation will conform to international law and abide with rules and regulations as mapped by the international order. Concerning economics, it meant free and open trade, drawing developing and developed nations into a network of a complementary ecosystem, deriving “betterment” for all. The once seemingly foregone conclusion that economic architecture will reinforce liberal, rule-based global order and help in strategic consideration, it is today being put to the test. The complex, fluid and complicated environment that characterizes the Indo-Pacific region necessitates some reflections.

This article seeks to understand the origin of ‘the Quad’ (hereafter referred to as Quad 1.0), its failure in 2007, and its re-emergence as Quad 2.0. Quad 2.0 can be further divided into the pre-pandemic Quad 2.1 and the pandemic onset Quad 2.2. The article then looks at Quad from the now established alignment theory and articulates the trajectory that Quad has traversed to reach Summit level meetings by focusing on the agenda marking its presence in the Indo-Pacific region. The latest development in this arena is the formation of a trilateral agreement between Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom (AUKUS). This article, therefore, questions the role of Quad in view of the formation of AUKUS and reflects on its implication.

While the cold war was all about alliances, approaches developed by Alliance Theory were a good explanation of the system that prevailed. However, the post-cold war has necessitated international theorists to revisit the alliance theory to find an explanation for groupings that emerged which were marked by continuous oscillations and fluidity and where cooperation did not necessarily centre on the traditional military security, and as many theorists claimed that orthodox alliance theory was a dominant subset of the alignment theory but not the only element. This article, therefore, makes use of the definition that ‘alignment’ is a “value-neutral concept that neither infers nor connotes any particular content to an inter-state relationship”,¹ that it is a “persistently evolving process”² allowing for “sustained realignment, upgrading or downgrading of cooperative relations.”³ This article provides an explanation and evaluates the origin of Quad by tracing its evolving dynamism through the prism of alignment theory.

Quad 1.0 Origin and Debacle

The genesis of Quad can be traced to the tsunami that struck most nations of Southeast Asia on December 26, 2004, leaving overwhelming devastation and claiming close to 226,000 lives, including a large number of tourists from across the globe⁴. In light of the devastation, four nations came together in this hour of crisis—the United States, Japan, Australia and India, to form “the Core Group” on humanitarian grounds, helping affected nations address and manage the disaster. The world witnessed a “new type of diplomacy.”⁵ In the face of the chaos and inchoate challenge, these four nations, because of their proximity, regional interest, economic strength, and military capability, swiftly mobilized tsunami aid and worked in a synchronized fashion to give support in the form of rescue operations, provisions and re-establishment of governance.

While the group disbanded after this disaster management activity, one country was keen to deepen the engagement of the other three nations in this region: Japan. A new vision was first floated through the idea of the “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” by Abe during his election campaign and formulated with conviction by Taro Aso, Minister of Foreign Affairs, under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s leadership.⁶ Accordingly, the arc would encompass Northern Europe traverse the Baltic states, Central and South-Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus, the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent, then cross Southeast Asia, finally reaching Northeast Asia. In centring “freedom” and “prosperity,” Aso laid the foundation of the current “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” as he pointed out that each country within the arc has unique characteristics in their way of life, be it religion or culture. Yet, Aso pointed out that all of them are hoping to develop and seek opportunities for greater affluence. In this, he clarified that these countries are trying to “find ways towards greater prosperity”⁷, at the same time working to “demonstrate its own individuality as a point of national pride”⁸. Thus, to reorient Japan’s foreign policy approach in the post-cold war, Abe and Aso put forward a new diplomatic game plan for Japan, expanding its role to address nations’ concerns beyond its previous sphere of Asia as it searched for a place in the new world order. When Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh visited Tokyo and a joint statement was released announcing that both nations were eager to begin a dialogue with other “like-minded countries in the Asia-Pacific region” to address themes of “mutual interest”⁹, the first peg for the formation of the Quad was established.

The momentum gained speed when, driven by his conviction, Abe in parallel persuaded then Australian Prime Minister John Howard and US Vice-President Dick Cheney to join the dialogue. Abe’s intention was to create a club of major maritime democratic powers in the Indo-Pacific as he was troubled by the rising assertiveness of China.

Abe's vision found credence when the four nations held their first exploratory meeting on the sidelines of the Asia Regional Forum held in Manila in 2007. The meeting was significant as four maritime democracies in an "informal grouping" discussed areas of common interest, including disaster relief. The consensus was to find common platforms for conversation, cooperation and mutual benefit. Thus Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) was formed.

China was not a silent observer to the formation of the Quad. Describing it as an "Asian NATO", China filed official demarches with the four nations and forewarned the implication of the coming together of major powers.¹⁰ It pursued its view of Quad as an anti-China forum and reached out to the ASEAN nations seeking support. Having strong economic linkages with China, many ASEAN nations also put forth their concern about how ASEAN is positioned with Quad. There were signs that rising China had slowly but surely eroded American influence in this region.¹¹

As an affirmation of the four nations' intention to give Quad a maritime security dimension, the Malabar exercises, which until then were held only between India and the United States, saw the participation of Japan and Australia. A fifth country, Singapore, was also invited, signifying the Quad's intention of inclusivity.

Failure of Quad 1.0 rests with the indecisiveness of its member parties. First, the informal meeting of Quad did not set any agenda, nor did it give any direction. India and Australia were keen to play a balancing game with China and showed reluctance to formalize the dialogue. Despite Abe's address to the Indian parliament describing the power of the "confluence of the two seas" (2007), post-Malabar exercise, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh emphasized that Quad contained "no security implication."¹² Australia position faltered right from the beginning. In July 2007, the Australia defence minister Brenden visited China and stated, "I have explained the nature of, and basis of, our trilateral strategic dialogue with Japan and the United States. But I have also reassured China that so-called

quadrilateral dialogue with India is not something that we are pursuing”,¹³ and withdrew its participation. In the United States, the first Quad meeting was described as a US project, “an axis of democracies”, a “security diamond”, or a way to contain China.¹⁴ The loss of the proponent of the Quad, Shinzo Abe, due to his health-related resignation in 2007, created a chasm as the dialogue lost favour with Japanese power brokers. Quad 1.0 ended as a non-starter.

The narrative of Quad 1.0 brought to the forefront China’s sway over the Indo-Pacific region. The Quad 1.0 attempted two initiatives—security dialogue and maritime exercise (Malabar exercise). In both cases, China drew the world’s attention, positioned Quad’s agenda as a “containing China”, and acted swiftly through diplomatic channels to raise its concerns. As a result, it was able to create a tentativeness not only among the nations in Indo-Pacific but also among Quad members. In a year, it was evident that the members faltered in finding common ground to address the challenges of this region; both Japan and India fell to domestic challenges of ‘democratic set-up’,¹⁵ and with the change of guard in Australia to Mr. Kevin Rudd, who had a stronger affiliation to China, the Quad lost grounds.

Hiatus: Recalibration

The demise of Quad 1.0, though unfortunate, in hindsight played a critical role in illustrating that these four democracies have a responsibility to this region. The Quad 1.0 meeting never raised China’s concern nor set any agenda that forewarned a security alliance. Yet, the angst of China towards this forum was visible, and China made it a point to bring it into discussions with Quad nations and sought allies in ASEAN nations, marking out the Quad as different. China had never been so vocal and active when other multilaterals were formed, demonstrating that China feared that this forum had the potential to work at ‘containment’ of China’s ambitions.

What followed in the interim period between 2007-2017 is noteworthy because, in many ways, these nations avoided drawing China's attention and engaged in bilateral and minilaterals regarding strategic and non-strategic concerns. Prominent development during this period was the strengthening of Japan-India relations, as both nations realized a large canvas of mutual interests and swiftly incorporated strategic concern into their economic engagements. Japan's keen interest in India's developmental programmes enabled India to gain economic dividends. The India-US relationship also enjoyed a quantum leap, especially with the signing of the US-India nuclear deal. The warmth between India-US and India-Japan would come to play a significant role in negotiating the establishment of Quad 2.0.

With the disintegration of Quad and no strong leadership among the Quad nations with a determination to put Quad back on track, the strong bilateral developments among these nations culminated a trilateral among Japan, India, and the United States. It started with a meeting of assistant secretary level officials in 2011, which by 2017 had graduated to Ministerial level.¹⁶ Along with this, military engagement deepened, with Japan becoming a permanent member of the Malabar exercise in 2015.

Quad 1.0 failure was pegged to Australia's withdrawal. The withdrawal was perceived as showing Australia's leniency towards China, and India feared Australia's strategic intent. Australia, in turn, was wary of China's reaction if it reverted to Quad: it readily settled for deepening bilateral engagement with the three nations, especially India, as it was not within the alliance system. Bilateral coordination gained precedence. India's relations with Japan and the United States strengthened, as did US-Japan relations, and India-Australia relations also found some footing. With small incremental moves in the interim period, a Japan-India-Australia trilateral was established in 2015 at the vice-ministerial level. While India accepted this trilateral, its tentativeness towards Australia was evident as it continued its military exercise at bilateral level-AUSINDEX, though it grew in size

and scope. Significantly, the two countries agreed to start a 2+2 dialogue at the level of defence and foreign secretaries.

As the world witnessed the rise of ‘peaceful China’, there was a bonhomie that China will work towards seeking acceptance within the world order. However, in this period, China’s assertiveness was witnessed in multilateral forums of WTO and RCEP and as it pressed its territorial claims in the South China Sea. Among the Quad nations, each one of them had their apprehensions with China to contend with. For Japan, China as its neighbour, on the one hand, faced territorial infringement, such as around the Senkaku Islands, or China’s establishment of an ADIZ, but on the other, it had deeply entrenched economic relations. The United States was faced with China’s geopolitical ambitions as it emerged as the second-largest economy and initiated alternatives like Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)—the former an infrastructure developmental programme, the latter a financial arm to support this initiative. Tariff and trade issues crept in as obstacles to the relationship despite United States acceptance of China’s WTO membership in 2001. Further, in its backyard the United States faced economic espionage allegedly sponsored by the Chinese government.¹⁷ Australia, which feared the repercussions of antagonizing China because of its dependence on trade with China, found its sovereignty threatened by the political influence of China in politics and universities. For India, historically, China’s behaviour had created mistrust. However, India had no intention to confront China and was seen holding off another attempt at Quad.¹⁸ The Doklam face-off with China and moves by China’s BRI moves, such as initiating China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, considered a strategic concern of India’s, impelled India to recalibrate its alignment orientation within its foreign policy of ‘strategic autonomy’.

Quad 2.1: Restore and Rebuild

While Abe's vision of the "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity" and the "confluence of the two seas" did not result in the outcome he envisaged, the implanting of this idea in the minds of strategic practitioners and academics was nevertheless an achievement. When Abe came back to power in 2012, he brought back his vision in a new avatar of "democratic security diamond" to "safeguard the maritime commons stretching from the Indian Ocean region to the Western Pacific."¹⁹ The notion of the Indo-Pacific as a region has grown since 2006 mainly because it was becoming an economic hub. This shift of economic activity from the Atlantic-Pacific region emphasized the necessity of maintaining law and order in this vast expanse. Hence, the Indo-Pacific concept increasingly appeared in most countries defence or strategic papers. Along with ASEAN nations, the five tigers had become the fulcrum of the economic activity, and ASEAN put forward its "centrality" within the Indo-Pacific framework. China's overall behaviour, particularly towards the Quad nations, necessitated that this group harness its strength and provide an alternative in light of eroding American regional presence. Moreover, the bilateral, trilateral, mini-lateral engagement among Quad members in common areas, including military exercise, begot trust, confidence and cooperation, thus, paving the way for the re-emergence of Quad. The exercise of setting in motion Quad 2.1 was similar to that of Quad 1.0. The US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Japanese foreign minister Taro Kono proposed re-formulation of the Quad. Officials at the assistant secretary level of the four nations met on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit in Manila on November 12, 2017. While there was no pre-determined agenda, the discussion included the concern of North Korea's nuclear ambitions, strengthening the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific", and promoting the rules-based order and shared values.

Lessons learnt from Quad 1.0 were apparent as each nation gave their statements which showed differences in their focus. For instance, the United States, Japan, and Australia emphasised freedom of navigation, overflight, and coordination of maritime security efforts, while India, the United States, and

Australia discussed connectivity issues. There were also efforts in place to appease ASEAN and give reassurance about adherence to ASEAN centrality and "inclusivity" in the Indo-Pacific region, while keeping any notion of that Quad 2.1 was geared towards 'containment of China' out of its discussion. The principal outcome that came from this second initiative was establishing a meeting of senior officials biannually and working towards ministerial-level meetings with a view to holding summit level meetings in future.

Nevertheless, two common threads of contention featured around the advent of Quad 2.1. First was that the Quad group was still a military alliance to contain China, and that it was provocative, acrimonious and disruptive to the region's harmony. This was not only a narrative in China and Southeast Asia but also within Quad nations themselves. The other narrative was whether Quad had any additional useful role to play since these four nations had already sufficiently created a nexus in military cooperation and other areas of concern through their trilateral and bilateral engagements. For instance, all six bilateral nodes had 2+2 dialogues involving the foreign and defence ministries. India, the weakest link as it was the one out of the alliance system, had improved its relations with all three nations. Even with Australia, India's Air Force participated in Australia's Pitch Black exercise in 2018, and India and the United States had reached a logistics supply and communications agreements after a long drawn-out negotiations. India-Japan relations had moved to summit level meetings and was considered the strongest, deepest, and warmest. Among the other three nodes, within the American alliance system, the United States and Japan had reinforced their alliance, and the maintenance of the American presence in Asia had been underscored. The US-Australia relationship had also been strengthened with US Marines rotating into Darwin and high-level political relations continued. All this pointed to a growing degree of comfort with defence cooperation in the regional context.

What both of these narratives were missing was the context that the Indo-Pacific region is a vast expansive space, and primarily requires freedom and openness to enable each nation to conduct its economic activity without any threat. Hence, the above trends that were set in motion of steadily deepening shared strategic worldview through nurturing habits of cooperation would hold grounds in Quad format as a balance of power to ensure free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific.

The two basic questions that were revisited with Quad's rebirth were defining the role of Quad and the issue of institutionalization. In both areas, there were uncertainties. A survey by Huong Le Thu of Southeast Asian nations showed strong fear of dilution of existing institutions such as ASEAN and East Asia Forum.²⁰ A survey of strategic elites of the four Quad nations by Buchan and Rimland showed that the Quad required a working group meeting with an agenda and focus.²¹ The survey pointed out that while a military task force did not find acceptance, especially among Indian strategic thinkers, softer initiatives in regional development and economic assistance and human rights promotion policies in Indo-Pacific found large acceptance especially, as did joint infrastructure development projects. As far as institutionalizing the Quad was concerned, the general sense was that it would impinge into Southeast nations fears and was a cumbersome effort.

China was by then unabashedly challenging the liberal rules-based order. China, therefore, continued its attempt to obstruct the Quad. Five distinct ways of portraying Quad were seen. The most common was to reveal Quad as a forum to confront China as viewed from "zero-sum" Cold War mentality. China continued to put forth its view strongly that Quad was a Tokyo initiative to marginalize China and that it was an exclusive club embracing Cold War calculations.²² China, therefore, argued that the formation of Quad essentially promoted instability in the region. At the regional level, China often portrayed Quad as a bloc that undermines existing regional multilateral institutions. It sowed the seed of mistrust by

portraying Quad as a bloc that overtime will undermine other regional multilateral institutions.²³ The result was that ASEAN, in no uncertain terms, expressed its discomfort in taking sides in US-China strategic competition. Nevertheless, few ASEAN nations had a clear notion of where they were positioned, and no formal opposition was witnessed. China also came up with a narrative that Quad, as a group was led by the United States, were ‘pawns’ of the United States; China also pointed to the fact that all four nations of Quad differed in their policies towards China and thus, Quad was a built on weak foundations.

Despite China’s confrontational attitude to the established rules-based order and down-riding the importance and strategic heft of Quad, and the asymmetrical power equations and divergence of views on what constituted the aims, purposes, and objectives of Quad 2.1, this forum gained momentum. This was built on a sense that the new Quad agenda needed to be positive, productive, and constructive towards this region in order to expand its presence and gain the trust of a multitude of diverse concerns of nations in the Indo-Pacific. Thus by 2019, Quad had surfaced in the Indo Pacific rim as a more viable group with a stronger commitment towards finding common areas of cooperation, without directly outlining the need to compete with China in the security realm even as it identified strategic sectors like infrastructure, critical technologies, and intelligence sharing for cooperation.

Quad 2.2: Pandemic and Roll-Out

Certain structural geopolitical changes characterized the pre-pandemic scenario. Under the Trump administration, the US adopted a confrontational approach, and the trade war between the nations grew. Japan’s disposition towards China was shifting from “*seikei bunri*” to a more security-based orientation.²⁴ India’s “Act East Policy” was gaining currency, and China’s presence in the region was a considerable threat. Australia, too, because of its domestic politics, had distanced itself from China. On November 24, 2019, a Quad meeting of senior officials

reflected a more directed agenda. The officials agreed that the Quad would enhance practical regional cooperation in fields such as maritime, counter-terrorism, cyber and humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief,²⁵ and looked forward to a foreign ministerial meeting in early 2020.

Little did one envisage that from March 2020, the world would witness a threat that would impose itself on every quarter of existence. While a health issue, its tentacles would impact society, economy, politics and re-orient the world, bringing forth the basic instinct of survival and a strong sense of nationalism. China was the ‘bad boy’ as it was established that the virus originated and spread from Wuhan. Protecting one’s people from this outbreak was uppermost in the leaders’ minds, leading to the closing of borders. “Lockdown”, “masking”, and “social distance” became the singular vocabulary of nations and all attention was focused on the health and related sectors. PPE, covid testing kits, mask manufacturing and vaccine acquisition drove nations to divert resources and establish manufacturing on emergency timelines. As the pandemic laid siege to nations, health sectors crumbled, showing just how vulnerable many nations really were. While governments became cognizant of looking beyond traditional security to embrace a model for “comprehensive security,” a new variable called “supply chain security” raised alarm as industries in countries shut down because of lack of supply of resources and inputs—primary resources, semi-processed inputs, components, and assembling units. The integration that globalization had achieved, especially in the Asia-Pacific under the principle of ‘free trade and comparative advantage’, stood exposed due to the pandemic, and many nations became inward-looking. With no roadmap available of either how to control the virus or how to put the economy back on track, nations grappled the best they could, bringing forth the critical need for good leadership.

Against this backdrop, Quad officials held a virtual meeting to discuss the all-encompassing issue of the COVID-19, inviting three new partners: South Korea, Vietnam and New Zealand. They looked for ways to synergize collective

efforts to contain the spread. This move is comparable to the origin of Quad 1.0 when yet another disaster had brought them together. This would pave the way for a more pragmatic model as most nations in this pandemic crisis faced predicaments on the economic front and desired stability in the region. It was well accepted in these meetings that they would not contest China's aggression in their neighbourhood at a bilateral level.²⁶ The outcome was officially low key. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), in a readout of the March 20, 2020 meeting, only said that these countries had a telephonic conference to share best practices and collaborate in their efforts to contain the spread of the virus.²⁷ Coverage of subject included the vaccine development, stranded citizens and coping with economic impact. While the meeting got much visibility because of the addition of members, it was criticized for offering neither a direction nor a plan of action.

As the pandemic continued to rage, China continued increasing its presence in the Indo-Pacific region by swarming the Sea of Japan, circumnavigating Japan, and conducting exercises simultaneously in the East China Sea and the Pacific Ocean. For Japan, protecting its territory and committing its allies to the cause of free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) had become a critical security concern. This was furthered by awareness of the supply chain issues that unfolded during the pandemic, causing severe distress to Japan's already faltering economic recovery. While domestic policies were formulated to encourage Japanese companies to delink from China, Japan desperately needed the world to recognize China's aggressive behavior and support the principle of rules-based order. For India, it was not only the presence of China in the waters of the Indian Ocean that caused alarm, but closer to home, China moved its military into Indian territory of Galwan Valley, which resulted in a stand-off, incurring a loss of men and material. Prime Minister Narendra Modi also addressed the nation, stating, "India wants peace. But on provocation, India will give a befitting reply"²⁸. This incursion from China happened at a time

when India was crumbling under the onslaught of Covid-19 and facing the worst surge. While keen to maintain strategic autonomy, India was driven to align itself with the American cause of “containing” China. Australia had distanced itself from Quad 1.0 in 2007 to buy peace with China. In the interim period between Quad 1.0 and Quad 2.0, China’s power projection beyond the first island chain, namely Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines, to the second island chain including Guam and into the Pacific, raised Australian anxiety. As Australia asked for an investigation on Covid -19 origin and spread from Wuhan, it faced the wrath of the Chinese embargo—the days of Australian balancing between China and the United States as a policy had waned considerably. The United States, under the Trump Administration, had embarked on a confrontational policy with China, and over time, the three other Quad members under these new circumstances converging with the United States.

The determination of the Quad nations was revealed when the foreign ministers met in person in October 2020. While a much-desired joint statement did not eventuate, sending signals that the four nations were yet to come to an agreement on China, the readouts of each nation gave certain indications as to where the Quad was heading. Each of these nations gave their vision of Indo-Pacific. In either one or two of the nation’s opening remarks, four words were mentioned: inclusive, resilient, peaceful, and stable. As expected, an inclusive Indo-Pacific found mention in Australia and India’s version, thus confirming these nations’ hesitation to draw swords against China. Resilient was mentioned only in Australia’s opening remark, pointing to their economic focus of delinking with China. India and Australia used "stability" in their vision, desiring more directed permanence. On the other hand, Japan preferred the adjective ‘peaceful’ for this region. The nuanced argument would be that India and Australia’s use of stability pointed to their security concern, and Japan avoided such strong references to bypass China’s attack. However, the inclusion of both security and economic interests were common to all of the opening remarks.

The most positive outcome of this meeting was an agenda encompassing long-lasting concerns of the centrality of ASEAN in Quad activities, maritime security, and counter-terrorism as well as new issues of Covid response and recovery and the importance of resilient supply chains. But, to the watchers of this forum, a lack of a joint agreement foretold that a common China policy was yet to have been achieved. Nevertheless, if one carefully lists out the activities that Quad members had engaged in through working groups or otherwise, fifteen activities like official meetings, ambassadors' meetings, signing of logistic agreements etc., have taken place. Thus, slowly but surely, Quad cooperation on a larger canvas was in the making. These types of working groups helped create interdependence among members and augurs well for further institutionalization.

As President of the United States, Joe Biden pledged to improve and make amends with his allies. Within 100 days he called for the Leaders' Summit of the Quadrilateral Framework, held virtually on March 12, 2021, with the other three leaders—Suga, Morrison, and Modi, showing their commitment to Quad and Indo-Pacific region. The Quad meeting happened took place on the heels of the 2021 Munich Conference, reflecting the importance that the United States gives to the Quad. The meeting highlighted cooperation among the member countries to beat the global COVID-19 pandemic, with the joint vaccine partnership and the need for an "open" and "free" Indo-Pacific region. A joint statement, "The Spirit of Quad", outlined "we will join forces to expand safe, affordable, and effective vaccine production and equitable access to speed economic recovery and benefit global health."²⁹ The virtual summit concentrated on the immediate needs of the members. Nevertheless, an open statement on maritime security focused on "collaboration, including in maritime security, to meet challenges to the rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas"³⁰, suggesting a potential for future common action and also reflecting buy-in by India. Traditionally, the maritime security issue was dressed down due to the uneasiness of India. Further, a paragraph on North Korea's denuclearisation spoke volumes in the Quad as a

vehicle for seeking stability in the region. In addition, five working groups, namely the vaccine expert working group, a critical and emerging technology working group, a climate working group for technology, and working groups for capacity building and climate finance, were identified during the summit. In a nutshell, the virtual summit meeting heralded on the one hand the urgency of Quad and its importance in diplomacy, and on the other, that it would work on a multitude of areas of need and cooperation beyond security cooperation.

Between the virtual and in-person summit-level meetings, official working groups and the foreign ministerial meetings were held. These meetings continued to reiterate the same lines: “They recognized that the changes underway in the world makes a strong case for their countries working closely together. It was important for the international community that the direction of changes remains positive and beneficial to all.”³¹

While the virtual summit set an agenda and put to rest fears of the fragility of this group, the in-person meeting within six months showed commitment of the four democracies. The joint statement, which concentrated on global health, climate change, critical emerging technologies, cyber security, and a Quad fellowship as part of people-to-people exchange, put forth “softer” projects in line with Indo-Pacific needs instead of promoting a singular counter-China orientation for the grouping. Given India’s hesitancy of naming China as well as that of ASEAN, whose “centrality” has become a defining proposition in the Quad’s public billing, the future of Quad is increasingly defined by the role it will play carrying along with it smaller states as it seeks to work a larger canvas.

AUKUS and its Implication

A new trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States was announced on September 15, 2021, for the Indo-Pacific region. It was not a treaty per se, but an agreement. In a joint statement,³² Joe Biden, Boris

Johnson, and Scott Morrison announced that in order to “deepen diplomatic, security, and defense cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, we are announcing the creation of an enhanced trilateral security partnership called AUKUS”, that, the leaders claimed, “will strengthen the ability of each to support our security and defense interests” through fostering “deeper integration of security and defense-related science, technology, industrial bases, and supply chains.” The objective was clear: strengthening Australia’s defense capability and enhancing Australia’s naval power. What caught the attention was that the deal called for the United States to provide Australia with nuclear-powered submarines. This sends a significant message to China, as these submarines can quickly reach and sustain presence in the waters of China. Further, the US has never shared this technology with anyone beyond the United Kingdom. Through this agreement, the liberal order is positioned to push back against China’s ambitions and aggression for the first time.

AUKUS raised a few questions, especially around timing: it came just as the United States lost diplomatic ground after the disastrous exit from Afghanistan, and now it had to deal with the angst of France (beyond the purview of this paper). In addition, because it came close to the in-person Quad summit, many questioned the relevance of Quad in view of AUKUS and what role Quad will play in light of this agreement, which has two members of Quad, and brings the United Kingdom into the Indo-Pacific region.

AUKUS is, however, more decisively addressing an essential concern of this region: aggressive China, although this element was couched in avoidant rhetoric to appease nations in the Quad forum. Having the advantage of comprehending the joint statement of the in-person Quad summit meet, it is clear that AUKUS has ventured into the military domain in which Quad has been reluctant to step in and had evolved away from. It exposed the Quad’s self-imposed limits and either its inability or lack of desire to pursue a military role. The joint statements, which provide mention of North Korea and Myanmar, provide evidence of this even as they directly avoiding mentioning China.

This takes us back to the origin of Quad, which, after all, was for a humanitarian cause in which the four nations showed lightning speed in decision-making and deployment and during which time there were recurring references to the need to delivering global public goods and addressing security and strategic concern through infrastructure building, cooperation in technologies and 2+2 dialogues while avoiding antagonising China. This is how we should assess Quad and its relationship to AUKUS in the security domain of the Indo-Pacific region. It implies that Quad, with its crowded agenda, no institutional framework and a large canvas, will work on building the Indo-Pacific FOIP vision through developmental projects and counter China by synergizing on critical technologies by harnessing each other strengths, and post-COVID-19, will focus on an alternative resilient supply chain which could negatively impact China's economy. Thus, the Quad approach is long-term oriented, which will not pose any threat through its immediate actions yet could strengthen this region for the future.

India welcomed AUKUS because, internationally, it showed American political resolve to engage militarily in the Indo-Pacific. It put to rest the longstanding dilemma of transferring military nuclear propulsion technology. India has its own nuclear submarine programme, and as India is consumed by threats from China in its Himalayan border, AUKUS helps protect its maritime flank. Thus, it reassures India which could have felt marginalized in this environment. Further, with yet another Quad between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, the United States, and India in the making, India is gaining the confidence of multilateral engagement. It seeks to use these platforms to gain international standing.

Japan appreciated AUKUS because for Japan containing China needs an alliance system. Burdened by its pacifist constitution, Japan does not have the capacity to handle China on its own. AUKUS brings in the heavyweight United Kingdom into the picture, it furthers US commitment, and Australia's increased

power projection, especially as it has shifted out of the pro-China mindset over the years, also assures Japan of Australia's definitive orientation.

ASEAN nations' responses to AUKUS have been more tentative. ASEAN is the most dynamic region of the world, follows consensual decision-making, lacks strategic ambitions as the epitome of multilateral groupings, decided to stay away from US-China rivalry and tried to position itself as a neutral broker. Of late, China's presence in this region's economic and strategic outreach had pushed ASEAN nations to demand centrality in any strategic game plan. AUKUS has definitely shaken the balance of power equation. The reaction of Indonesia's Foreign Ministry was targeted towards criticising the continuing arms race and power projection in the region and said that Indonesia was "deeply concerned" about "Australia's commitment to continue meeting all of its nuclear non-proliferation obligations".³³ Malaysian Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob, in a telephone call with Morrison the day following the AUKUS agreement, "expressed concern over the AUKUS cooperation, which will catalyze the nuclear arms race in the Indo-Pacific region."³⁴ While Philippines Duterte welcomed the agreement, he seconded the concerns of Indonesia and Malaysia. While the issue of the arms race and nuclear proliferation is being raised, Singapore, Vietnam and Thailand's silence is an implicit recognition of the fact that AUKUS stands to neutralize China's influence.

In a nutshell, the AUKUS is decisively a military agreement with a strong focus on technology sharing, having opened doors to sharing military nuclear propulsion technology, amongst other weapons systems. While it has implications for nations in this region, Chinese now encounters a formidable force driven by the United States, positioned through Australia. AUKUS has been derided for its Anglo-Saxon overtones and some claim that it distorts peace and stability. AUKUS does not, however, replace Quad, and all Quad nations understand the significance of this agreement. Instead, it allows Quad to pursue a more natural agenda "providing global public goods" as a policy, which will strengthen the nations in

this region by embedding critical technologies, communication networks, and infrastructures.

Conclusions

Quad is not a formal treaty, and for its members, it is not the only platform in Asia. It has brought like-minded maritime democracies together. Further, bilateral and trilateral agreements also bind them. Quad cooperation has peaked and waned depending on the leader's commitment and domestic politics of these four nations. It has responded to crises, like the pandemic, more promptly than China's aggressive moves in the Indo-Pacific region. Quad achievements are in developmental and humanitarian areas. It has been fluid, engaging with more nations; an example is the inclusion of Singapore in maritime exercise in Quad 1.0 and South Korea, Vietnam and New Zealand in the Quad 2.2 virtual meet of officials at the beginning of the pandemic. The Quad journey from Quad 1.0 to Quad 2.2 lines up with the argument that nations realign, upgrade or downgrade according to the current strategic ecosystem. Quad, therefore, illustrates the crux on which alignment theory rest. AUKUS, on the other hand, resst on the alliance theory as it currently stands as a security alliance between alliance partners with a focus on the Indo Pacific.

Quad critics have questioned it for crowding the agenda and playing on too large a canvas. Quad nations have their differences, but because of engagement through many platforms, they have had increased interactions and cooperation, helping to iron out differences and develop trust. Even when the Quad was temporality defunct, the Quad nations were involved in many forms of bilateral and trilateral engagement, reiterating the importance of "alignment".

Quad is here to stay because one witness many new formulations, in line with the current Quad, like India, the United States, Israel, and United Arab

Emirates. The pandemic has created uncertainties that have compelled nations to recalibrate their domestic policies and international relations. The vulnerabilities beyond traditional security concerns like the issue of the supply chain, health inadequacy, digital insufficiency etc, has necessitated more cooperation. While China continues to show its belligerence, the defence of the liberal order requires countries to work in multi-faceted options to push back against China.

The signing of AUKUS led to a debate over the role of Quad. While the initiation of Quad contained security elements in its initial schema, as discussed above, the containment of China could never be overtly nor covertly embraced. Rather, it has been apparent from its agenda that stronger convergence is visible in the developmental paradigm. This is appropriate given that the impromptu coming together of these nations was originally as a humanitarian act. Thus, the Quad will cooperate on strategic infrastructure and technologies to underpin economic development and stability. In the long run, strengthening and securing the economies of this region will require cohesive, networked nations. Thus, given the current world disorder, establishing platforms for “productive global public goods” will help connect the smaller nations to the realization of the Quad’s ambition of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

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Abe ill health and his resignation followed by revolving door leadership; Dr. Manmohan Singh's push for US India Nuclear Deal faced stiff opposition from his coalition members, mainly the left party, which was supporting Congress from outside.

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