

Quad 2.0: New perspectives for the revived concept

Views from *The Strategist*

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Introduction

Huong Le Thu

In late 2017, the revival of an idea over a decade old—the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue—created a wave of debate, concern and anticipation across the world. The Quad, as it is commonly referred to—or, more precisely, Quad 2.0, as this is its second life—is an informal dialogue between four of the world’s major democracies: the US, Japan, Australia and India.

Quad 2.0, like Quad 1.0, is a controversial yet important idea that has survived the test of time. The four members’ first major get-together was in December 2004, when they responded to the massive Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami in a coordinated multilateral humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operation. Following that, in 2007, the first informal meeting between the four happened on the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum in Manila. Soon afterwards, the first naval exercise involving all the Quad members drew [Chinese diplomatic protests](#), after which Prime Minister Kevin Rudd pulled Australia out of the exercise. Quad 1.0 fell into lethargy.



Sailor aboard HMAS *Kanimbla* keeping a lookout off the coast of Darwin: [Department of Defence](#).

It's controversial because it's perceived to be a way of containing China, which makes it unpopular among many of those who believe that China can't be contained. Other critics say that it's an improbable platform for cooperation, especially in the area of defence, among such a diverse group. Concerns (and misconceptions) have also arisen among regional actors, particularly ASEAN, which is said to see the Quad as a way of bypassing its own centrality.

After a decade, the strategic environment has become more tense, and concerns about China's actions and position in the region, as well as globally, continue to deepen, justifying the revival of the concept. It was Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's concept of a 'democratic security diamond', [unveiled](#) in December 2012, that first brought the Quad back to life. And in November 2017, Japanese Defence Minister Taro Kano gave an interview that again focused attention on the Quad idea.

Unlike Quad 1.0, Quad 2.0 seems to have gained Australia's bipartisan support. The government's 2017 foreign policy white paper [confirmed Canberra's strong commitment](#) to trilateral dialogues with the US and Japan and, separately, with India and Japan: 'Australia is open to working with our Indo-Pacific partners in other plurilateral arrangements.'

India has reportedly been the most ambivalent of all. This Strategic Insight includes nuanced and diverse views from Delhi about how Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to approach India's participation in the Quad. India's vital interests in the Indian Ocean and China's activities in the area can make the Quad more compelling as a framework for strengthening Delhi's security.

Official policy documents affirm the US's full commitment to Quad 2.0 as one of Washington's key security avenues. The [Asia Reassurance Initiative Act](#), which President Donald Trump signed recently, reads in part:

- (1) the security dialogue between the United States, Australia, India, and Japan is vital to address pressing security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region in order to promote—
 - (A) a rules-based order;
 - (B) respect for international law; and
 - (C) a free and open Indo-Pacific; and
- (2) such a dialogue is intended to augment, rather than replace, current mechanisms.

This raises a question about whether the US government sees the Quad as part of the policy of confronting China, which has gained momentum after hardline national defence and national security papers, Trump's tariff war, and [Vice President Mike Pence's speech](#) at the Hudson Institute calling out China as a strategic competitor.

Out of the many question marks that punctuate each Quad member's national debate about the utility of the grouping, one thing is clear: their views remain barely coordinated.

This is apparent even to external observers. An [original ASPI survey](#) has shown that, despite the common view that ASEAN is suspicious about the Quad, ASEAN member states evince a wide range of dissimilar opinions and assessments of the value of security cooperation amid growing challenges. The disparate views among individual ASEAN member states, as well as the gap between political leaders and intellectuals in the region, reflect the complexity of the strategic environment today.

A key to the success of the Quad is its relationship with the Indo-Pacific concept. Quad 2.0 coincides with the [promotion of the theme of a 'free and open Indo-Pacific' \(FOIP\)](#), also articulated (although not without differences) by the four partners, which adds to the general confusion. Because the Quad shares some of the principles that are supported by the FOIP, the two are often conflated. But while the FOIP advocates openness and inclusivity, the Quad is a minilateral, which by definition has exclusive membership and a limited and sharply focused agenda. In each case, more conceptualisation is needed: both the FOIP and the Quad continue to suffer from a lack of clarity, and as a result are gaining limited external support.

Perhaps Quad 2.0 has received substantially more attention than is warranted by its meagre showing to date. Three meetings of officials from the four governments have been held, without producing binding official joint statements. Yet, Quad 2.0 has become one of the most debated and contested ideas in current geopolitics. Why?

To objectively answer that question, this collection of articles from ASPI's *The Strategist* comprises a diversity of perspectives on the relationship between the Quad and a range of countries' national and regional interests. The contributors shed more light on the prospects for the development of Quad cooperation and explain how the individual nations involved in the Quad, as well as regional actors that are concerned about it, will respond to the challenges and opportunities ahead.

What is Quad 2.0?

The fundamentals of the Quad

Walter Lohman, 13 February 2019

Since 2013, the Heritage Foundation, together with ASPI and think tanks in India (Vivikananda International Foundation) and Japan (first the Tokyo Foundation, and now the Japan Institute of International Affairs), has hosted a discussion called the ‘Quad-Plus Dialogue’.

The idea of a quadrilateral dialogue, of course, was not the brainchild of the Heritage Foundation or our partners. In fact, anyone familiar with it knows that it originated in Japan, during Shinzo Abe’s first stint as prime minister.

What Heritage and its partners did do was revive the idea and keep the conversation going until our governments signed back up. Throughout that effort, those of us from Heritage (I can’t speak for the other organisations) were guided by several key principles. Now that the Quad has been revived at an official level, it bears laying those out to help give shape to the way forward.

First, the forum would mostly be about China. We have never pretended otherwise. We weren’t insensitive to Chinese concerns with the concept of an official Quad. At some level, it’s understandable. No government wants to be the subject of a multinational discussion. Still, the impact of China’s rise to global power is something that must be acknowledged directly. Dissimulating would dilute focus in our home capitals, and not only not fool the Chinese but breed greater distrust.

Second, additional partners—what we called ‘plus’ countries—could provide critical perspective. At first blush, bringing other organisations or governments into Quad discussions may look like the expansion of an anti-China coalition. It’s true that including others allows us to explore for synergies in approaches to China, on maritime security, for example. More importantly, however, non-Quad countries serve as sounding boards. Their relationships with China will be affected by what the Quad does, as will their operating environments in the diplomatic, security, economic and other domains. They should be heard, not only because they deserve to be, but because they have valuable, unique insights.



Puzzle pieces: istock photo/FatCamera.

Third, we recognised that all four Quad countries and the ‘plus’ partners have productive relationships with China—especially on the economic side of the ledger. Some of them have acute conflicting interests, such as over India’s land border and the China–Pakistan relationship, China’s claims in the East and South China seas, and the standing threat to Taiwan. But those conflicts aren’t the sum total of their relationships. Reflecting this reality, we never characterised the effort as anything resembling ‘containment’—which we calculated would be a perfect way to kill it, through irrelevance.

Fourth, coordination among the Quad countries shouldn’t be about economics. There’s sometimes a fine line between economics and security. Should the Quad coordinate on investment screening or technology development, for instance? Absolutely. But it can’t be about gaining market advantage vis-à-vis China. It should be strictly about minimising direct security risks. Neither is the Quad about shaping national economies, creating trading blocs or establishing exclusive supply chains. Such antidotes would only make worse the sicknesses caused by China’s market distortions.

Fifth, values matter. It’s no accident that the Quad countries are liberal democracies. Likewise, all of our ‘plus’ partners enjoy liberal political freedoms at home and support an interstate liberal order abroad. The former has mostly been implicit in our discussion. The way countries govern at home affects the way they interact with the world. Discussions of how to best craft the institutions of interstate order have been much more explicit.

Not everyone’s going to like this formulation of the Quad, especially those partial to the clean lines of global geopolitics. But the truth is that the political systems of the Quad countries, those of the ‘plus’ partners and China’s own are much too complex for that. Each country involved has conflicting internal interests, not to mention conflicting interests with one another. Of course, the Quad-plus countries share many interests, too, and not only those related to China. They come together for the express purpose of coordinating those overlapping interests.

The most important thing that unites the Quad countries, however, is an awareness that managing the rise of China is the defining challenge of our era. They know that getting it wrong will make the difference between war and peace, security and insecurity, prosperity and want, and freedom and oppression. This is what has brought our think tanks together for going on six years, and it should continue bringing our governments together long into the future.

For print readers, the original piece with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-fundamentals-of-the-quad>.

The Indo-Pacific? The Quad? Please explain ...

Graeme Dobell, 9 April 2018

Australia’s embrace of the Indo-Pacific concept over the past five years drew mild interest from the region and curious discussion. The US adoption of the Indo-Pacific in both its [national security strategy](#) and [national defence strategy](#) means the construct/label/geographic vision suddenly matters big-time.

What does the Indo-Pacific frame portend or predict for the way business will get done around here? Understandings aren’t agreed. The meaning of the Indo-Pacific matters if it’s ‘[an organising principle for US foreign policy](#)’.

Australia’s resumed role in the [second coming of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue](#) (after a 10-year hiatus) is different, but the arguments rhyme. Again, the discussion gets a major push from the Trump administration.

The Indo-Pacific is an attempt to embrace everybody—but a lot of nations aren’t too keen on embracing the label.

The Quad is a different beast because it bands four democracies—the US, Japan, India and Australia. And the band is reforming because Australia is ready to play. When Kevin Rudd’s Labor government won office in 2007, he withdrew Australia from the band. For Rudd, the Quad was too big a provocation of China.

Exit Oz from the Quad Mark I—then there were three. That’s why officials gathered in New Delhi last week for the [9th trilateral meeting of India, Japan and the US](#). The 9th trilateral’s purposes are those of the resurrected Quad:

practical steps to enhance cooperation in the areas of connectivity and infrastructure development; counter-proliferation; counter-terrorism; maritime security, maritime domain awareness and HA-DR [humanitarian assistance and disaster relief].

Beyond the ‘practical steps’ explanation, though, everyone knows the bigger story: the boys are putting the band back together because Beijing has been a bully.

Both sides of Oz politics have reached bipartisanship on the Quad, as they did more smoothly on the Indo-Pacific.

The Indo-Pacific consensus was expressed by Labor’s [2013 defence white paper](#), the Coalition’s [2016 defence white paper](#) and the Coalition’s [2017 foreign policy white paper](#). Adding to the Indo-Pacific accord, Labor has signalled that it won’t do another Kevin and squib the Quad if it wins office.

Last month, Labor Shadow Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Shadow Defence Minister Richard Marles endorsed the ‘[valuable complementary role](#)’ of the reborn Quad:

It makes a space for four like-minded trading democracies to share their thoughts on regional security. The high-level discussions add another layer of co-operation to the intersecting bilateral and multilateral activities in place across the region. Defence exercises, particularly naval exercises, with these countries and others in the region also play a critical role in building operational understanding and confidence which in turn is vital for the security of the Indo-Pacific.

The Trump strategies and the 2017 Australian foreign policy paper point to the shared worries of the boys in the band.

Under the heading ‘Power shifts in the Indo-Pacific’, the Australian white paper declares:

China’s power and influence are growing to match, and in some cases exceed that of the US. The future balance of power in the Indo-Pacific will largely depend on the actions of the US, China and major powers such as Japan and India.

Turn to the Trump national security strategy to see a description of ‘revisionist’ China challenging ‘American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity’, wanting ‘to shape a world antithetical to US values and interests’, and seeking ‘to displace the US in the Indo-Pacific region, expand the reaches of its state-driven economic model, and reorder the region in its favour’.

The Trump strategy lauds Japan as ‘our critical ally’, notes Australia’s support for ‘our shared interests and safeguards democratic values across the region’ and welcomes ‘India’s emergence as a leading global power and stronger strategic and defence partner’, declaring: ‘We will seek to increase quadrilateral cooperation with Japan, Australia, and India.’

The Australian historian [James Curran](#) says the banding of the four Indo-Pacific democracies is worthy diplomatic symbolism:

In essence, the Quad has already done the job its proponents want it to do: sending a warning to China. This warning is not to be underestimated given the legitimate concerns about Chinese strategic behaviour in recent years. Such is the meaning behind the euphemism of showing ‘strength in numbers’. The problem with the Quad is that no matter how important or symbolic this gesture, sooner or later the lack of real substance in its strategic intent will show.

Seeking the substance, [Ankit Panda](#) offers a close reading of the explanations provided by the four members of the band when they reunited in November 2017. The Quad knows what it wants to sing about: a free and open Indo-Pacific; a rules-based order; freedom of navigation and overflight; and respect for international law and maritime security.

The Quad challenges China's assertiveness with high principles and practical exercises. This is the diplomacy of dissuasion, not a new 'instrument of hard containment'.

ASEAN mistrusts the Indo-Pacific label and is spooked by the Quad. Australia hasn't had much success arguing that Southeast Asia is at the centre of the Indo-Pacific. The 'not made here' aspect of ASEAN centrality makes the association resentful of labels it didn't invent. South Korea asks quietly about the utility of the Quad. And if the utility answer is hazy, why embrace something that so angers China?

Both the Indo-Pacific and the Quad offer a looking-glass moment:

'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.'

'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you can make words mean so many different things.'

'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master—that's all.'

For print readers, the original piece with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/indo-pacific-quad-please-explain>.

The real significance of the Quad

Dhruva Jaishankar, 24 October 2018

In India, Australia and other Indo-Pacific countries, we have been regularly inundated with commentary about the 'Quad', the informal name for a grouping of countries comprising the United States, Japan, India and Australia. There are two popular refrains. One is **alarmist**: the Quad is a **military alliance** to **contain** China and its very idea is provocative, divisive and unnecessary. This is the view of not just some **critics** in the four countries, but also many **in China** and **Southeast Asia**. The second and more common reaction is **scorn**. For sceptics, the Quad has never amounted to much and is **unlikely to**, given various countries' **hesitations**. The accusatory finger is usually pointed **at India**, sometimes **at Australia**, and occasionally **at the United States** after Donald Trump's election as president.

Both views fundamentally mischaracterise the Quad and its objectives. For now, it is merely a bureaucratic-level foreign-ministry-led dialogue that **meets occasionally** after a 10-year hiatus. While the four countries have conducted some military activities together—humanitarian assistance and disaster relief following the **2004 Indian Ocean tsunami**, **naval exercises** in 2007, and public appearances by **senior military leaders**—the Quad isn't a defence dialogue, much less an alliance. It serves the limited purpose of political signalling and improves coordination among a set of like-minded and capable maritime powers in the Indo-Pacific.

However, it's not the Quad's relatively modest activities to date that are the real story. Over the past two years, military engagements involving the US, Japan, India and Australia have broken new ground. Today, the four enjoy unprecedented levels of information and intelligence exchanges, personnel interactions, interoperable equipment and habits of cooperation. But by ignoring the rapidly growing military engagement among the four countries that comprise the Quad, many analysts are in danger of missing the forest for the trees.

It's helpful to examine the Quad less as a bloc of four countries and more as a matrix of trilateral and bilateral relationships. The four already enjoy three trilateral and six bilateral strategic dialogues, not counting a host of other military engagements and working groups.

Trilaterally, US–Japan–Australia engagement is the most advanced, given the legacy of US alliances and the recently unveiled trilateral [infrastructure agreement](#). Meanwhile, the US–India–Japan trilateral dialogue is now held at the ministerial level, [Japan has been permanently included](#) in India–US naval exercises, and a trilateral [infrastructure working group](#) has been established. A [Japan–India–Australia](#) trilateral dialogue was recently initiated.

Other developments point to growing ‘minilateralism’. This year, India’s air force participated in Australia’s [Pitch Black](#) exercise, representing a growing degree of comfort with defence cooperation in a regional context. The commonality of equipment— notably [maritime patrol aircraft](#)—is significant for improving collective maritime domain awareness and anti-submarine contingencies, and adds another element of interoperability. Nor are emerging regional trilateral relations exclusive: India and Australia have initiated a [trilateral dialogue with Indonesia](#), the US and Japan meet regularly with South Korea, and all four countries have [deepened their ties with France](#), which boasts a [remarkable presence](#) in the Indo-Pacific.

In addition, every constituent bilateral relationship among the Quad countries has strengthened in recent years. All six bilaterals now feature 2+2 dialogues involving the foreign and defence ministries. America’s relations with Japan and Australia are naturally much more developed. Overcoming past squabbling over basing arrangements, the US and Japan have [recommitted themselves](#) to their alliance. The US–Australia relationship has also been reinforced with [US Marines in Darwin](#) and continued [high-level political relations](#).

Two other bilateral relationships have grown in importance. For India, the US now rivals Russia as its most significant defence partner. Beyond a host of diplomatic, defence, staff and technical dialogues—including the first 2+2 dialogue in September—India–US military exercises have become more regular, with [army special forces](#) and [air exercises](#) reinitiated after a hiatus. After more than a decade of negotiations, a [logistics supply agreement](#) and [communications agreement](#) have been signed. India has also acquired several major [defence platforms](#) from the US, and preliminary efforts at [joint defence production](#) and [research and development](#) are underway. Similarly, the Japan–Australia relationship has undergone some significant changes. In addition to their 2+2 dialogue and naval exercises, the two countries are planning their first bilateral [air exercises](#) and are negotiating a [visiting forces agreement](#).

The weakest military links among the Quad countries were traditionally India’s relations with Japan and with Australia. In addition to the Malabar naval exercises, India and Japan may conduct their [first air and ground force exercises](#) over the next year. India–Japan staff talks have expanded to three services, and strategic dialogues have been elevated to the ministerial level. Japan has [made offers](#) to India about the sale and co-production of defence equipment, and [agreements](#) on defence technology and the security of classified communications have been concluded. Even India–Australia security ties have improved significantly over the past two years. The initiation of a 2+2 and new trilaterals have bolstered the strategic content of engagement. Military-to-military contact has also increased with the [AUSINDEX](#) naval and Australia Hind army exercises, Australian participation in India’s [Milan](#) exercise, regular port visits, and staff talks.

Thinking of the Quad in narrow terms—cooperation solely and exclusively involving the US, Japan, India and Australia—misses a far more important trend in regional security dynamics. Strategic partnerships between all four countries are steadily deepening, and this process has only accelerated. The growing number of military exercises, strategic dialogues, technical agreements and coordinated activities are manifestations of increasingly shared strategic worldviews, greater comfort levels and growing habits of cooperation. These are the trends that will matter much more for the balance of power and the prospects of a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific than any amount of loaded commentary about the official quadrilateral dialogue.

For print readers, the original piece with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-real-significance-of-the-quad>.

The Quad as an enabler of regional security cooperation

Bhubhindar Singh, 13 November 2018

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (commonly known as the Quad), an informal grouping comprising the United States, Japan, Australia and India, made a return in 2017. Have the Quad's prospects improved after it failed to take off when it was first introduced in 2007?

The answer is a qualified yes. The main reason for this positive reading is the emergence of the Indo-Pacific strategy in the regional security discourse. The relevance of the Quad is augmented as the states within it and beyond begin to form their security policies based on the Indo-Pacific geographical concept. The Quad could serve as an enabler to strengthen security cooperation among its four members, as well in other bilateral, trilateral and multilateral arrangements in the complex regional security architecture.

The region is facing rising uncertainty. China's reclamation and militarisation of reefs and islets in the South China Sea, the stand-off between India and China in Doklam, and the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula are just some of the key strategic issues that regional states are concerned with.

At the macro level, the US-China competition has intensified, as witnessed in the escalating trade war. While China has benefited from participating in the US-led postwar order, it is also clear that the rising power prefers to reform the order to suit its interests. Beijing is pushing an ambitious agenda involving the formation of China-led projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Concerns also stem from the Trump administration's 'America First' and anti-globalisation policies, as well as its questioning of the value of alliances in Northeast Asia.

The potential revision of the East Asian regional order brings strategic uncertainty, especially in relation to the US's role, China's intentions, and the strength of ASEAN's unity and centrality in the region.

The entry of the Indo-Pacific concept into the regional discourse has had two important consequences. First, the strategic theatre for the US and its allies and partners is increasingly being defined by a wider geographical lens, beyond East Asia. This broadening increases the strategic importance of India and Australia in ensuring stability in the region alongside the US and Japan.

Second, as a counter to the 'US is in decline' narrative, the Indo-Pacific focus prolongs US-led predominance and leadership in the region. The US military changed the name of its Pacific Command to Indo-Pacific Command, highlighting both the influence of the Indo-Pacific notion on strategic policy and America's intent to preserve the US-led order in the Indo-Pacific region.

With the rising prominence of the Indo-Pacific strategy, it's no surprise that the Quad made a return in 2017. Officials from the four countries have held two meetings since 2017, which is notable progress after a 10-year hiatus. All four nations support the 'free and open Indo-Pacific' theme, albeit with some variations between them.

The Quad serves as a convenient platform for the four members to come together. The fact that it is a small, informal arrangement made up of like-minded states makes it relatively easy for them to engage effectively in security cooperation.

The Quad acts as an enabler in two specific situations. First, it allows the four states to build confidence in security cooperation based on mutual trust, common values (such as to maintain a 'free and open Indo-Pacific'), and a shared vision of regional and international order.

Second, it strengthens cooperation through other multilateral security arrangements in the region. All four countries are integrated into the ASEAN-led regional security architecture through their status as dialogue partners of ASEAN. They are members of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus, the East Asia Summit, and the ASEAN Regional Forum. They are also members of the US-led Rim of the Pacific biennial naval exercise.

At the same time, the four members are engaged in bilateral and trilateral security initiatives. The Quad could not only exist alongside these security arrangements, but work with them to ensure regional stability.

No doubt, several challenges remain that could hamper the Quad's effectiveness. These include the strength of the members' political will for supporting the Quad (especially in India), the varying threat perceptions held by the four states, and ASEAN's concerns about the Quad.

Regardless of the much-discussed weaknesses, the time is ripe for the Quad in the Indo-Pacific era. However, it will be most effective if it remains an informal enabler of security cooperation in the ASEAN-led security architecture.

For print readers, the original piece with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-quad-as-an-enabler-of-regional-security-cooperation>.

Why the Quad won't ever be an Asian NATO

Andrew O'Neil and Lucy West, 24 January 2019

The most recent meeting of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit in Singapore last November suggests that the US, India, Japan and Australia regard the initiative as a geostrategic multiplier in the Indo-Pacific. Despite the evident convergence, there have been few signs of a genuine renewal of the Quad's purpose since it was resuscitated in 2017 after a decade-long hiatus.

This is underscored by the absence of a unified declaration following the Quad's meetings in 2017 and 2018. Although individual statements released by the four members after the meetings agreed on the importance of a free and open Indo-Pacific, they overlapped [on few points of detail](#). And although Quad boosters [assert](#) that its foundations are stronger today than they were a decade ago, the absence of a single joint statement betrays the inherent limits of the initiative.

The recent revival of the Quad was triggered by the return of Shinzo Abe as Japanese prime minister in 2012. Shortly after returning to office, Abe wrote [an essay](#) promoting a 'democratic Asian security diamond' to forestall Chinese 'coercion'. The proposal endorsed the view that the US, Japan, Australia and India should cooperate to 'safeguard the maritime commons stretching from the Indian Ocean region to the western Pacific'.

India's threat perception vis-à-vis China has increased in the decade since the Quad was first initiated, pushing it closer to Washington and US allies in Asia like Australia and Japan. The increase in Chinese naval deployments in the Indian Ocean and the rapid modernisation of China's nuclear weapons program, including its sea-launched ballistic-missile capabilities, have exercised Indian planners and provoked a greater emphasis on [the link](#) between national strategy and maritime force projection. These concerns have been overlaid by India's apprehension about the growing reach of China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Australia's concerns over China's strategic posture in the Indo-Pacific and its overt militarisation activities in the South China Sea have been reinforced by revelations of interference by Beijing in Australian domestic affairs. Disclosures of the Chinese Communist Party's influence in Australia have included attempts to bribe high-level officials, pressure for Chinese-language media outlets to toe the line on key issues, monitoring of Chinese students in Australian universities, and recruitment of sympathetic advocates to articulate the CCP's position in the [media](#).

These factors have coalesced to create a more permissive environment for Australia's participation in the Quad and other minilateral security initiatives. The Quad has the [support](#) of the opposition Labor Party as well as the Coalition government.

For the US, returning to the Quad after a 10-year hiatus dovetails with the Trump administration's preference for a more explicit acknowledgement of competition with Beijing, not just in the strategic arena but also in the economic domain. Washington's continuation of freedom-of-navigation operations in the South China Sea—notwithstanding the clear risks of military escalation—and the Trump administration's appetite for zero-sum confrontation with Beijing over trade, signal a renewed determination by the US to contain Chinese great-power ambitions.

While Trump is less focused than his predecessors on promoting the idea of a concert of democracies in the Indo-Pacific, the Quad aligns with his disdain for large-scale multilateralism and his fixation on burden-sharing with allies and security partners. Perhaps more importantly, the Quad maps closely to the Pentagon's [vision](#) of developing America's Indo-Pacific alliances and partnerships 'into a networked security architecture capable of deterring aggression, maintaining stability, and ensuring free access to common domains'.

However, given the Quad's history, there are serious doubts about whether it can be sustained. As La Trobe University's Nick Bisley has [argued](#), 'there is not a single vital national interest that all four share'. Perhaps tellingly, in contrast to 2007, the resurrection of the Quad in 2017 elicited very little apparent concern on the part of Beijing. This reflects [China's broader reaction](#) to US-led minilateral initiatives, as distinct from specific initiatives taken as part of US bilateral security alliances, which tend to attract vociferous condemnation from China.

Beijing probably feels reasonably confident that underlying divisions between US allies will prevent an Asian NATO from emerging and that most, if not all, American allies in the region (and those not allied to the US, such as India and Indonesia) will avoid formal multilateral security commitments because of their [acute dependence on Chinese trade and investment](#). Ultimately, Beijing's reading of minilateralism's (and, by extension, the Quad's) prospects may be close to the mark.

All four parties have clear incentives to constrain, and in some cases push back against, Beijing's growing assertiveness, but that won't necessarily sustain the Quad beyond its recent resurrection. There's little indication that members are serious about mapping the Quad's future in detail, and while perspectives within ASEAN are [mixed](#), Singaporeans (perhaps surprisingly) remain the most sceptical about the Quad.

One school of thought may be that the Quad parties will discover a renewed purpose only if Beijing uses force in a regional contingency. That may be credible, but it's more likely that the US, Japan and Australia will focus all their efforts on leveraging existing bilateral security alliances in response to a major uptick in Chinese military activity. And it is difficult to envisage India seriously buying into a conflict in the South China Sea when even Japan and Australia place caveats on how much their alliances with the US formally commit them to do in certain scenarios.

In the final analysis, we're likely to look back on the Quad's resurrection in 2017 as another false dawn for the development of meaningful security arrangements outside formal alliances in the Indo-Pacific.

For print readers, the original piece with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/why-the-quad-wont-ever-be-an-asian-nato>.

Views from the inside

Australia and the Quad

Ramesh Thakur, 5 July 2018

On 18 January 2018, [admirals from Australia, India, Japan and the US sat together](#) on stage at the high-profile Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi. Their presence reflected the shared strategic assessment that China has become a disruptive force in the Indo-Pacific. Taking time out to deliver [a lecture](#) at India's National Defence College, Australian Defence Industry Minister Christopher Pyne echoed [remarks by Indian PM Narendra Modi to the Australian Parliament in 2014](#), affirming that [India had shifted from the periphery to the centre](#) of Canberra's strategic frame.

Yet on 30 April, [the Australian reported](#) that Australia had failed in its push to secure an invitation to join Japan and the US in the annual [Malabar exercises](#) with the Indian Navy. The explanation provided was that Delhi didn't want to offend China ahead of the [informal summit between Modi and Xi Jinping](#) in Wuhan on 27–28 April. That's misleading. India's naval exercises with Japan and the US are a strategic challenge for China; Australia would add only modest capabilities.

There's a threefold basis to India's reluctance to invite Australia back into the Quad: the shadow of a previous abandonment of the Quad by Australia; an imbalance in the depth of bilateral relations with Australia compared with those with Japan and the US; and consideration of China's sensitivity. The last is especially important because of perceptions about [Australia's seeming instinct for perpetual war](#) and the Turnbull government's turn to an [anti-China posture](#) over the past 18 months.

The origins of the Quad were entirely benign. In December 2004, in response to the massive [earthquake and Indian Ocean tsunami](#), the four countries with the maritime capabilities, logistical resources, political will and decision-making capacity to act quickly and effectively came together in a core group to coordinate tsunami relief. The memory of that remarkable experience in multilateral cooperation on disaster relief and humanitarian assistance lingered and in time gave birth to the Quad.



Australian, Indian, Japanese and US flags: Flickr/Rita Willaert, Carlos Zambrano, Ruth Hartnup, Alan Parker.

The first informal quadrilateral summit was held on the margins of the ASEAN Regional Forum meeting in Manila in August 2007 between the PMs of Australia, India and Japan and Vice President Dick Cheney. The four joined Singapore the following month in a large naval exercise that drew Chinese diplomatic protests. In February 2008, PM Kevin Rudd pulled Australia out of the combined exercises.

However, years of subservience to Chinese sensitivities failed to soften Beijing's growing assertiveness across the Indo-Pacific. India began aggressively pursuing diplomatic initiatives to the east, Washington announced an Asia pivot, and the Coalition government began to articulate public unease about aspects of Chinese behaviour in Australia's primary strategic region.

The US [national defence strategy](#) alleges that China 'is leveraging military modernization, influence operations, and predatory economics to coerce neighboring countries to reorder the Indo-Pacific region to their advantage' in pursuit of 'Indo-Pacific regional hegemony'. In response, says the [national security strategy](#), the US will 'increase quadrilateral cooperation with Japan, Australia, and India'. Australia's [2017 foreign policy white paper](#) similarly asserts: 'The future balance of power in the Indo-Pacific will largely depend on the actions of the United States, China and major powers such as Japan and India.'

The Indo-Pacific frame integrates geography, the 'free and open' principle and democratic values into one strategic construct. The Indian Ocean covers a fifth of the world's ocean area, with almost 50 countries around its littoral and immediate hinterland. With links to both the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans, it is of vital commercial, political and strategic importance to India.

India's peninsular shoreline exposes it to seaborne threats from the east, west and south, while also giving it a major commercial and geostrategic location astride the sea lanes of communication between the Middle East and East Asia. Adding population, economic weight, military power and diplomatic clout gives India multiple roles in safeguarding sea lanes, countering piracy, containing Islamic militancy and mounting disaster relief operations.

The Australian continent is part of the geographical divide between the Indian and Pacific oceans. Australia is inextricably invested in the security of both regions. If the Indo-Pacific is accepted as the new organising principle of the foreign policies of Australia, India, Japan and the US, then the four coming together informally in the Quad is a logical outcome. Australia's participation would have symbolic value in highlighting the entente cordiale between the long-established democracies but would add marginally to the cost in India's relations with China.

India's policy elite remains suspicious of Australia's reliability. At a [joint press conference](#) in Canberra on 5 February 2008 with his Chinese counterpart Yang Jiechi, Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said: 'One of the things which caused China concern last year was a meeting of that strategic dialogue [with Japan and the US] plus India, which China expressed some concern with' and 'Australia would not be proposing to have a dialogue of that nature' again. On 10 February, [Smith explained](#) that the 2007 quadrilateral meeting had been a 'one-off'. While the trilateral dialogue with Japan and the US would continue, the 'four-way conversation' would not.

The optics of the announcement in the presence of China's foreign minister, and the substance of the unilateral cancellation of the Quad, still colour India's assessment of Australia's credentials. This also explains why [India spurned an invitation to Australia in 2017. India was uncertain of 'Australia's "strategic clarity" vis-à-vis China](#), particularly as China has made significant inroads into Australia'. Yet India was happy to hold bilateral AUSINDEX naval exercises with Australia in 2015 and 2017. The two have also agreed to a 2+2 dialogue involving their defence and foreign secretaries.

Growing nervousness at China's assertiveness and latent apprehensions about the limits of its regional ambitions are the prime motivations for the Quad's revival. The complementary security interests are given ballast by shared political values and a rhetorical commitment—often breached in practice—to an open rules-based order.

For each of Australia, India and Japan, the relationship with the US is the single most important and that with China the second most critical—outweighing the importance of the other two partners. That means there will always be strong pressures to subordinate ties with the lesser two partners to China’s sensitivities. As a military grouping with a China containment agenda, the Quad would polarise the region further and bend it in the direction of a tense, zero-sum competition.

Rather than a military alliance aiming for strategic deterrence, therefore, the overarching goal should be diplomatic dissuasion, underpinned by extensive working-level engagement in foreign and security policy and military-to-military interactions.

For print readers, the original piece with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australia-and-the-quad>.

India has the most to lose if it doesn’t embrace the Quad

Lavina Lee, 8 November 2018

The revival of the Australia–India–Japan–US security quadrilateral (informally known as the Quad) is anticipated to be a key plank of the ‘free and open Indo-Pacific’ strategy. In theory, deeper cooperation among four powerful democracies with similar anxieties about China’s rise should strengthen a balance of power that favours the preservation of the rules-based order across the Indo-Pacific. The sceptical viewpoint is that India remains the weakest link: Delhi is unreliable and will protect its strategic autonomy at any cost.

A case can be made for scepticism. Despite apparently warming to the idea, India again refused Australia’s request to join the Malabar naval exercises with the US and Japan held in June. It’s likely Sino-Indian relations had something to do with it, given Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s efforts to ‘reset’ relations with China after the [resolution of the Doklam border crisis](#) in August last year. More substantively, Modi might have feared that further upsetting China could have provoked Beijing to hit India where it hurts most: by helping Pakistan stir up additional trouble in Kashmir and along the disputed borders between India and China.

Even so, enduring strategic concerns will eventually force India to adopt a more strident policy against China, and the Quad will become an increasingly important grouping to that end. Delhi’s fear of encirclement has been heightened by Beijing’s disregard for India’s claims to a sphere of influence over its neighbours and direct moves to undermine this influence. The role of ‘debt-trap diplomacy’ in securing access to potentially dual-use ports in Pakistan and Sri Lanka is well known, with India fearing that they could be converted to military uses in the future. Beijing’s gunboat diplomacy in the Maldives in February, ostensibly to prevent potential Indian intervention in that country’s constitutional crisis, brought home the growing Chinese intrusion into India’s sphere of influence. This is a competitor who spends around four times more than India on its military according to [2017 figures](#).

There are reasons why the Quad will become more compelling for Delhi despite its historical and rhetorical commitment to strategic non-alignment.

First, the other three Quad members are the most formidable naval powers operating in the Indo-Pacific, other than China. Both the US and Japan represent sources of cutting-edge military technologies and are likely to share some of that with like-minded countries as part of a free and open Indo-Pacific strategy. Australia may not be a direct source of such technology, but its own naval capabilities in the Indian Ocean—particularly in the areas of maritime domain awareness and submarine warfare—should not be underestimated. Australia too has the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean, which could be developed into important [strategic territories](#).

Second, cooperation with Quad countries will help India to fill gaps in maritime domain awareness over the vast Indian Ocean. This may be in the form of access to military technology designed for this purpose (for example, India's introduction of US P-8 surveillance and strike aircraft), development of jointly used military infrastructure (bases, ports, airstrips) and information- and intelligence-sharing. On the latter, India's signing of the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement with the US in September allows it to obtain secure and encrypted defence communications and data equipment from Washington, as well as access to real-time data-sharing with the US and other friendly forces.

Third, India knows that its greatest long-term challenge and threat is Chinese ambitions in the Indian Ocean and not land-based disputes with Pakistan. Deepening maritime cooperation within the structure of the Quad will help institutionalise 'strategic discipline' in this context. Indian pre-eminence in the Bay of Bengal is apparently a priority for the Modi government. If that's so, deeper commitment to the Quad—an essentially maritime grouping—will help Delhi keep its eye on the ball and prevent attention and resources from being diverted back to the army to be absorbed by permanent spats with Pakistan.

Indeed, the maritime division of labour among the four countries allocating resources and capability to areas and zones where they have an advantage makes sense. If India can persuade the US, Japan and Australia to support Delhi's desire to emerge as the preeminent security provider in the Bay of Bengal within a Quad structure, then that's something every Indian government would support in a post-Modi era.

China's emergence as an [Indian Ocean power](#) is narrowing India's choices, which Delhi only intermittently recognises. It remains the weakest link among the Quad countries. However, the Quad is becoming a more important grouping for India than for the US, Japan or Australia.

Will India soon emerge as champion of the Quad rather than reluctant participant? Yes, if Delhi chooses self-help over self-harm.

For print readers, the original piece with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/india-has-the-most-to-lose-if-it-doesnt-embrace-the-quad>.

The Quad as a caucus for cooperation

Akiko Fukushima, 30 November 2018

Whenever a 'minilateral' is launched, its exclusive membership is questioned. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue among Australia, India, Japan and the United States has suffered from that fate. When it was about to gain momentum in 2007, the Quad caught the attention of those who weren't in it. It was harshly criticised as constituting a coalition against China; some media [dubbed](#) it an 'Asian NATO'. From then on, hesitation to pursue a quadrilateral meeting hamstrung the four members and the initiative was put on hold. It lay dormant for the next 10 years.

During that time, the momentum for dialogue and cooperation among countries in the region was sustained. Trilateral dialogues, such as Japan–Australia–US and Japan–US–India, and bilaterals at both track 1 and 2 levels, with flexible geometry, have continued. Intergovernmental dialogues can be difficult to organise due to official positions and sensitivities. But informal dialogues involving government officials in a personal capacity, academics and media can be a useful testing ground for new ideas. The common concern about maritime security that prompted the Quad's initial exploratory meeting didn't subside, and even increased, over the next decade.

In 2012, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, recalling his 2007 speech to the Indian parliament on 'the confluence of the two seas', [proposed](#) that India and Japan play a greater role with Australia and the US in promoting peace, stability and freedom of navigation in the Pacific. He suggested that the four form a 'security diamond' to safeguard the maritime commons stretching from the Indian Ocean to the Western Pacific.

Abe expanded the idea of a security diamond with his concept of a 'free and open Indo-Pacific', which he launched at the Tokyo International Conference on African Development in 2016. Japan has pursued this vision to improve connectivity in the region. Others have since adopted the Indo-Pacific nomenclature: the US used it in its 2017 national security strategy, as did Australia in its 2017 foreign policy white paper. There seems to be a great convergence in the region on tackling issues within the footprint of the Indo-Pacific.

Beyond the region, France and the UK have also come to embrace the Indo-Pacific concept. Momentum has emerged from beyond the four Quad countries in promoting cooperation in the wider Indo-Pacific region.

This growing interest in the mega-regionalism of the Indo-Pacific seems to have woken up the slumbering Quad. In August 2017, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono [proposed a meeting](#) with the foreign ministers of Australia, the US and India in the margins of the upcoming East Asia Summit. Senior officials of the four foreign ministries [met](#) for quadrilateral consultations on ensuring greater security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region in November 2017 in Manila. Four defence ministry senior officials met in India to exchange views on the regional situation in January 2018. And in June and November 2018, four foreign ministry officials at the director-general level met again in Singapore.

Can a revived Quad be upgraded to the level of foreign and defence ministers—or even to the summit level—and be sustainable and consequential in years ahead? The Japanese government regards the Quad as an important framework, but, according to officials I spoke with after the November meeting in Singapore, it wants the process to develop at a pace that's comfortable for all the members rather than push forward in haste.

If the Quad process is to go further, two challenges will need to be addressed.

First and foremost, the four members are not in sync on the conception of the global order they wish to pursue. India, as reflected in the '[Nonalignment 2.0](#)' policy paper, is keen to pursue multipolarity, with India as one major pole. The other three, despite subtle differences, have recently pursued security cooperation through the existing US–Australia and US–Japan alliance relationships. Moreover, each of the four countries will always be at a slightly different point in the up-and-down cycle of its relations with China. That can cause different levels of risk aversion when it comes to activities that might attract Chinese criticism. The four need to arrive at a clear, shared perspective on the region's long-term challenges and trends, rather than being buffeted by temporary bilateral imperatives.

Second, given the Asia–Pacific's tradition of managing multilayered multilateralism, the Quad, if it is to be sustainable, must be an inclusive mechanism and be able to reconcile with the wisdom of ASEAN-centred regionalism. Also, it must show that it can deliver tangible results at a time when multilateral cooperation is harder to sustain.

To meet these challenges, the geometry of the Quad needs to be flexible; neither the format nor the composition should be fixed. An adaptable framework would promote recognition of the Quad as an anchor or an idea incubator for issues-led functional cooperation for peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific. This practical and flexible approach would allow both the Quad and the Indo-Pacific vision to exhibit their diffused reciprocity for those interested.

However, the caveat is that the more countries involved in a minilateral, the harder it is to get the group to do anything. Bilateral cooperation is hard enough, trilateral is even harder, and quadrilateral is very hard indeed. In order to surmount these challenges, functional cooperation is the way forward.

For print readers, the original piece with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-quad-as-a-caucus-for-cooperation>.

India and the Quad: weak link or keystone?

Jeff Smith, 15 January 2019

They say the strength of a chain is measured by its weakest link. The same may be true for the Quad, the group of four Indo-Pacific democracies—Australia, India, Japan and the US—that gathered in November for their third security dialogue in 12 months.

Since the Quad was revived in November 2017 after a 10-year hiatus, international observers have been left with myriad questions about the group's intentions and objectives, with many portraying it as some form of anti-China coalition. They seem clear on one thing, however: if the group has a weak link, it is undoubtedly India.

Delhi indeed appears to be the outlier among the four, seemingly the least enthusiastic about the Quad's potential and the most anxious about provoking a backlash in Beijing.

India was widely considered the weak link when the Quad was first established in May 2007. At the time, Delhi was still in the early stages of a reorientation away from its non-aligned past towards more robust strategic partnerships with the US and Japan. After facing down internal resistance to participating in the first quadrilateral security dialogue, partly for fear of alienating China, the Indian government was left jaded when Australia withdrew from the group in early 2008, ironically in deference to China's sensitivities.

In the years that followed, India dismissed appeals from Japan and the US to revive the Quad before finally relenting in mid-2017. The decision came after a particularly contentious few years in China–India relations, replete with major differences over China's Belt and Road Initiative, its efforts to deny India membership in the Nuclear Suppliers Group, its protection of Pakistan-based terrorists from sanctions, and an unprecedented border standoff on the Doklam plateau in the northern summer of 2017.

With the Quad now restored, why is India still considered the weak link, and where does it diverge with the others?

First, India's reticence is evident in its desire to keep the Quad relegated to mid-level representatives. Whereas Canberra, Tokyo and Washington have signalled their interest in promoting the dialogue to the level of minister/cabinet secretary, Delhi has been clear that it prefers to keep it at the level of joint/assistant secretary.

Second, India has resisted efforts to elevate the Malabar naval exercise to a quadrilateral affair. A bilateral India–US naval exercise begun in the 1990s, Malabar became synonymous with the Quad in 2007. Months after the inaugural dialogue, Malabar was expanded to include naval assets from all four countries (as well as Singapore). The exercise was again downgraded to a bilateral initiative after the Quad collapsed in 2008. However, Japan rejoined the exercise in 2009, eventually being inducted as a permanent member in 2015. By contrast, Australia's private and public lobbying efforts to rejoin Malabar have been rebuffed by Delhi each year since 2015.

Third, among the four, India has sought to frame the Quad in the most inclusive, least confrontational terms. It has also underscored the importance of separating the Quad from the 'free and open Indo-Pacific' concept that has come to embody the group of rules, laws and norms that have governed the region for decades but are increasingly under duress. Some see the Quad as the 'muscle' that could one day be called upon to defend that order, but India continues to underscore the importance of separating the two.

India's approach to the Quad is influenced by several factors.

India believes it has more reason to fear China's wrath. Delhi has traditionally been cautious about alienating Beijing and wary of joining multilateral initiatives that could be perceived as anti-Chinese or resembling a balancing or containment coalition. In part, this anxiety springs from a misperception about how Beijing operates—that it's more deferential to the interests of those who appease it.

However, India is also driven by more pragmatic considerations. It's the only member of the Quad with a large land-border dispute with China and the only country that has faced a Chinese invasion over the past century. Compounding the problem, India is also the only member of the Quad without formal security guarantees from other members.

India is taking a wait-and-see approach with Australia. Some Indian analysts argue privately that its cautious approach to the Quad has less to do with worry about offending China than with fear that Australia is potentially compromised by Chinese influence.

Delhi has far more confidence in the American and Japanese dispositions. It prefers to pursue the most meaningful strategic initiatives at the bilateral level and the robust trilateral Japan–India–US strategic dialogue. Indian experts privately admit that Australia showed more 'backbone' towards China under the Turnbull government (2015–2018) but say they'll need to see a Labor government display the same resolve before they can be confident of Australia's commitment.

India picks its battles. India may be the most reluctant member of the Quad, but it's actually been the most steadfast in confronting Beijing in other arenas. Consider: India was the first member of the Quad to halt diplomatic endorsements of Beijing's 'One China' policy back in 2010, insisting that China first recognise India's sovereignty claims in Kashmir and along the China–India border if it wanted reciprocal treatment.

As important, India was the first member of the Quad to raise major concerns about China's expansive Belt and Road Initiative, opposing the ambitious project at the outset. Last year, Australia, the US and several European countries began voicing many of the same concerns and shifting to a position of hostility towards the BRI. Finally, India showed resolve in staring down the People's Liberation Army during the Doklam border dispute.

India wants options. Delhi may see one benefit to slow-walking the Quad and Malabar: it offers additional tools for signalling to Beijing in the future. At the moment, India's relations with China are stable. Beijing has even launched a charm offensive recently in Delhi as it grapples with how to respond to unexpected broadsides from the Trump administration. India may see upgrading either the Quad or Malabar as a useful strategy for responding to any future Chinese provocations.

While the rest of the Quad must acknowledge India's unique position and sensitivities, kindling Delhi's enthusiasm for the initiative is likely to depend less on reassurances from the democracies and more on China's behaviour. If the perceived threat from China grows, the gravitational pull of the Quad will grow stronger. If it doesn't, India's enthusiasm for upgrading the Quad will remain subdued.

Ultimately, however, the differences between India and the other three democracies pale in comparison with their shared interests and objectives—namely, upholding and defending their interests and the rules-based order under new challenges from a rising China. Even if India slows the pace of progress in the short term, the long-term benefits of its inclusion appear to far outweigh the costs.

In any event, there may be a silver lining to India's slow-dance with the Quad. 'The beauty of the Quad', notes Australian scholar Rory Medcalf, 'is that it makes the world safe for trilateralism.' With international attention focused so squarely on the Quad and its modest progress, India has been quietly breaking new ground on an almost monthly basis with Australia, Japan and the US at the bilateral and trilateral levels.

For print readers, the original piece with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/india-and-the-quad-weak-link-or-keystone>.

Quad supports US goal to preserve rules-based order

Derek Grossman, 7 February 2019

Following the first meeting in November 2017 of the [resurrected](#) Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad, the US has been consistent in discussing the security objectives it seeks to promote through the consultations. However, US interactions with other Quad partners—including fellow democracies Australia, India and Japan—have likely convinced Washington to repackage public presentation of the dialogue proceedings and manage its expectations of what the Quad can realistically achieve.

For now, the US is probably content with simply using the Quad as a way to signal unified resolve against China's growing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific without directly antagonising Beijing. That may change in the future if US–China relations deteriorate further or Beijing's behaviour towards regional neighbours becomes even more aggressive.

In today's context of the Trump administration's policy to keep the Indo-Pacific 'free and open' from coercion, Washington's participation in the Quad makes much sense. According to both the US [national security strategy](#) and [national defence strategy](#), China is an adversarial power seeking to 'displace' the US from the Indo-Pacific to 'reorder the region in its favor'. In response, Washington has been reinvigorating its alliances and strengthening ties with its partners, not only bilaterally, but multilaterally as well, and the Quad is one such multilateral mechanism.

Washington's key objective when contending with Beijing in the Indo-Pacific is to preserve the liberal international order that has been in place since the end of World War II. It's no coincidence, then, that the Trump administration gravitated towards Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's 'democratic Asian security diamond' concept, encapsulated in an [essay](#) in 2012, as the blueprint for Quad 2.0's activities. Abe's security diamond concept is a values-based foreign policy approach structured around shared democratic norms, which have been highlighted in every Trump administration statement or comment on the Quad talks. (For the record, Quad 1.0 had a similar [backstory](#) under the George W. Bush administration.)

For example, after the first Quad 2.0 meeting in November 2017, the US released a [statement](#) noting that the Quad 'rests on a foundation of shared democratic values and principles' and that all sides pledged 'to continue discussions to further strengthen the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region'. The next two Quad meetings, in [June 2018](#) and [November 2018](#), reiterated the same desire to preserve the rules-based order.

When asked informally about the Quad, Trump administration officials have similarly highlighted the need to bolster the rules-based order through consultations with like-minded democratic partners. While then Secretary of Defense James Mattis was attending the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2018, he [observed](#) how 'all four [Quad members] are democracies. That's the first thing that jumps out at you.' At India's Raisina Dialogue in January 2019, the commander of US Indo-Pacific Command, Admiral Philip Davidson, [characterised](#) the Quad as a 'burgeoning relationship rooted in some 25 years now'. He further offered that the rules-based order is important because 'it is advocacy for free nations in terms of security, values, political systems, and the freedom to choose their own partners'.

Washington's strategy of working through the Quad to express resolve probably has its limits, as other members have shown discomfort in going too far—particularly to avoid giving the impression that the Quad is a military alliance designed to contain China. As I've [discussed](#) elsewhere, India likely has serious reservations. Since meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping for an informal summit at Wuhan in April 2018, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has seemingly softened his position on China to make good on their 'reset' in bilateral ties. During his Shangri-La Dialogue [keynote speech](#) in June 2018, Modi argued that 'India does not see the Indo-Pacific region as a strategy or as a club of limited members'—an implicit criticism of the Quad. He also said that Delhi prioritises regional 'inclusiveness' and highlighted the 'centrality' of ASEAN to any ordering and decision-making in the Indo-Pacific.

As a result, after the second Quad 2.0 meeting in June 2018, the US began including India-friendly language on the centrality of ASEAN in its Quad press statements. The shift might negatively affect Washington's values-based approach. But, as I've [argued](#) previously, it's likely to bolster the Quad's legitimacy by bringing an ASEAN maritime counterclaimant, such as Vietnam, into the conversation to coordinate pushback against Beijing's violation of international law and norms of behaviour in the South China Sea. Delhi has also sought to keep the visibility of the Quad low by [arguing against](#) increasing the seniority of leadership participation to cabinet or ministry level from assistant secretary or director-general level.

India is almost certainly not the only Quad partner with concerns, judging from the fact that all four countries have yet to issue a joint communiqué. In addition, in the military domain, Quad 2.0 is yet to conduct joint military exercises or joint freedom-of-navigation operations to challenge China's growing assertiveness in the region, which the US would likely welcome and has probably been encouraging. The first Quad iteration [conducted](#) a joint exercise in 2007 and included Singapore, so such a move wouldn't be unprecedented. But instead of symbolic shows of force, this Quad has opted to keep a very low profile (no Quad partner has even referred to the Quad as the Quad—merely as quadrilateral 'consultations'). In fact, US policymakers tend to [describe](#) the Quad as an example of one multilateral mechanism, among many others, that the US has at its disposal. In other words, the Quad is nothing special—unless the others collectively come to the conclusion that it is.

The US probably believes the Quad has served the basic purpose of signalling unity of resolve among democracies and like-minded partners to counter China's growing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region. However, if US-China competition continues to heat up, particularly in the South China Sea, Washington will likely increasingly look to the Quad—and specifically the military dimension of the cooperation—to defend the liberal international order.

For print readers, the original piece with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/quad-supports-us-goal-to-preserve-rules-based-order>.

Regional responses

Quad goals: wooing ASEAN

William Choong, 11 July 2018

The revival of the so-called Quad or, more formally, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, has hogged regional newspaper headlines in the past year—at a time when China’s rise and concurrent assertiveness have sparked much concern across the region.

One would have thought that the concept, [as originally agreed upon by Australia, India, Japan and the United States](#), would have been brought up by Quad ministers during the [Shangri-La Dialogue last month](#).

Sometimes, however, the salience of regional security issues lies not in what’s said, but in what isn’t said.

Delivering the keynote at the dialogue, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi talked about evolving a ‘common rules-based order’ based on sovereignty, territorial integrity and dialogue. He didn’t mention the Quad specifically.

Similarly, US Secretary of Defense James Mattis spoke about a ‘common rules-based order’ that would apply to all states and the global commons. He didn’t mention the Quad either.

The same applied to the defence ministers from Japan and Australia. Itsunori Onodera spoke about a ‘free and open Indo-Pacific’ that can bring wealth and prosperity to all regional countries. Marise Payne talked about a ‘rules-based global order’ centred on a shared consensus about the rules. But neither mentioned the Quad.

When asked what he thought about the Indo-Pacific strategy, Mattis stressed that the four democracies had a ‘common character’ that led to serious discussions about stability, open navigation and peaceful resolution of disputes. As for the Quad, Mattis said that he had left the term on the cutting-room floor to reduce the length of his speech.



The principles that underpin the Quad are straightforward, and pretty palatable to most countries in the Indo-Pacific: a rules-based order, freedom of navigation and overflight, and respect for international law and maritime security.

But it's understandable why no ministers hoisted the flag of the Quad during the dialogue. For the Quad to be viable, it needs ASEAN's support; and for such support to be forthcoming, the grouping mustn't be seen as a form of soft containment of China.

But ASEAN harbours concerns that any new multilateral grouping such as the Quad could undermine the organisation's centrality and unity, and could be used to contain China. Tacit coordination among the four Quad ministers at the dialogue could have been possible; if such coordination didn't actually occur, it's still a significant coincidence that there was no specific mention of the Quad.

The Quad has several things going for it. It was left for dead in 2008, after the government of Kevin Rudd withdrew Australia's support in the face of Chinese opposition. In November 2017, senior officials from the Quad countries met on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit to discuss common Quad goals. In May, US Pacific Command was re-named Indo-Pacific Command to reflect its broader remit.

In the medium term, the Quad needs to focus on two major challenges—offering a credible alternative to countries burdened with debt resulting from their participation in China's Belt and Road Initiative, and deterring further Chinese militarisation of the South China Sea.

The most daunting challenge, however, is securing buy-in from ASEAN. The fact is that ASEAN, whether it formally signs up to the Quad or not, is central to the Indo-Pacific strategies of the US and its key allies.

In his keynote, Modi underscored ASEAN's leading role in regional integration. Australia's 2017 foreign policy white paper [stressed](#) that ASEAN, straddling Australia's northern approaches, is of 'profound significance' and the nexus of the Indo-Pacific architecture. Likewise, Japan [deems](#) ASEAN, which sits at the confluence of the Indian and Pacific oceans, as central to its Indo-Pacific strategy.

Writing in *The Strategist*, Evan Laksmana [observed that Indonesia's conception of the Indo-Pacific](#) doesn't challenge the 'free and open Indo-Pacific' concept preferred by Japan and the US; Jakarta also does not oppose 'minilateral' arrangements such as the Quad. In addition, Jakarta doesn't want any Indo-Pacific arrangement to undermine ASEAN's centrality or exclude certain countries, such as China.

These tenets can be accommodated by the Quad. Modi, Mattis, Onodera and Payne have all stressed that ASEAN's centrality is vital. As for the inclusionary principle, Quad members could well say that nothing bars a new entrant from joining a Quad-plus arrangement—provided the entrant adheres to shared rules and principles.

This was the case with the ill-fated Trans-Pacific Partnership. Before Trump torpedoed the TPP in January 2017, the deal was seen by the Obama administration as a [platform](#) for the US and its partners to accelerate protection of labour and environmental standards, intellectual property protection, and a free and open internet (rules that China would have had difficulty adhering to). The door wasn't shut to China explicitly; rather, China would have had to commit to such principles and reform its economy if it had wanted to join the TPP.

In short, ASEAN could still be convinced to sign up to the Quad, if Quad members explicitly state that the grouping isn't exclusive and wouldn't undermine ASEAN.

In May, Singapore’s foreign minister, Vivian Balakrishnan, [said](#) that Singapore wouldn’t sign up to the free and open Indo-Pacific strategy or the Quad—at least for the time being. He added that the Quad concept did not adequately address the question of ASEAN centrality. In June, Balakrishnan [said](#) that he was encouraged that both Modi and Mattis had affirmed ASEAN centrality and unity at the Shangri-La Dialogue, and that both India and the US had reaffirmed inclusiveness.

While it might be early days, Balakrishnan acknowledged that such concepts were ideas that Singapore could subscribe to. The details, he added, would need to be worked out and negotiated in the future. ‘Watch this space’, he concluded.

The Quad could well have some legs left. Quad-plus or Qua-sean, anyone?

For print readers, the original piece with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/quad-goals-wooing-asean>.

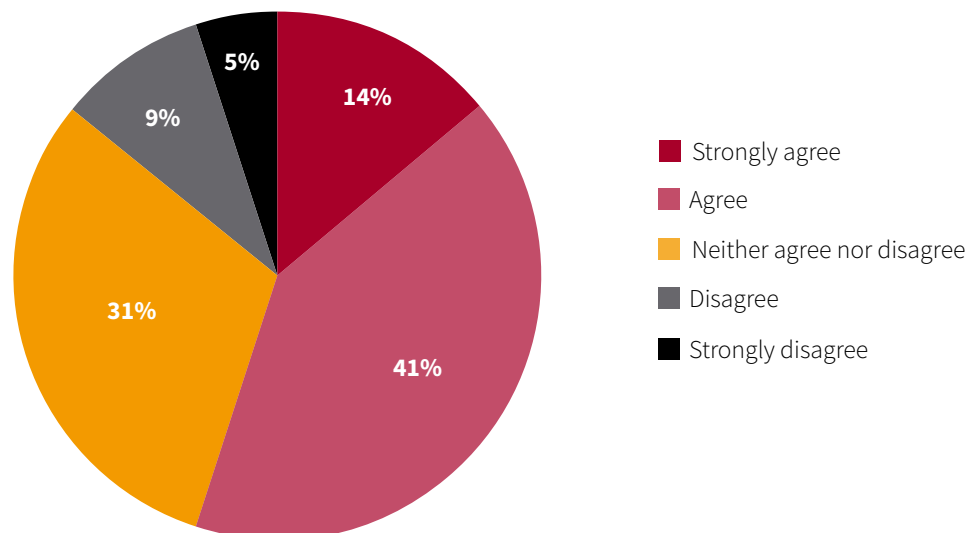
Support for the Quad outweighs scepticism in Southeast Asia

Huong Le Thu, 23 October 2018

The debate about the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue revived as Quad 2.0 has been centred largely around perceived negatives: the harm it could cause rather than what it can really contribute to regional security. Those assumptions are based on perceptions (or, more correctly, misperceptions), whereby the Quad is seen as too confrontational towards China as well as challenging the centrality of ASEAN. These views have been so strong that much of the debate about the Quad has been about explaining what it is not, or not intended to be, rather than articulating what it is and understanding its broad objectives.

But my latest [ASPI study](#)—the first quantitative survey on the perceptions of the Quad in the Southeast Asian foreign and defence policy community—demonstrates that these negative views aren’t necessarily correct, nor are they the prevailing wisdom.

Figure 1: The Quad will contribute to stability and peace of the Indo-Pacific region



While some in Southeast Asia are more concerned about the Quad’s detrimental influence on the centrality of ASEAN, most survey respondents believe that the Quad actually complements the ASEAN-centred regional framework. The study found that Indonesians and Singaporeans are relatively more sceptical of the Quad than other ASEAN respondents, who were decisively more supportive of the initiative as a positive contribution to the region’s wellbeing.

A total of 44% of all ASEAN respondents saw the Quad as complementing the existing ASEAN security frameworks, while 21% thought it challenges ASEAN-led architecture. The biggest supporters of the Quad are those who value its potential role in maintaining security and stability—the Vietnamese and Filipino respondents.

A total of 36% of respondents saw the Quad as a necessary ‘anti-China bulwark’, while 21% believed that to view the Quad in that way is dangerous. Interestingly, none of the Vietnamese and Filipino respondents saw the ‘anti-China bulwark’ view of the Quad as a dangerous development, compared with 50% of Singaporean and 37% of Thai respondents who thought the Quad could foster a potentially confrontational atmosphere in the region.

Survey respondents saw value in the Quad members’ engagement in regional security even if that risks being viewed as confrontational towards China. A decisive majority (69%) of respondents expressed the hope that the Quad can contribute to enforcing the rules-based order, particularly in relation to territorial and maritime disputes. These findings contradict the popular commentary that the Quad should restrict its activities to non-controversial tasks, such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Southeast Asians clearly prefer a mechanism that would help preserve adherence to the rules-based order and international law.

The survey of Southeast Asian attitudes points to some key challenges for the evolution of the Quad. The lack of clarity about long-term objectives among Quad members themselves presents as the biggest concern for the formation’s future. A total of 48% of respondents expressed concern that the interests of Quad members are too divergent and their mission is unclear. Provoking China was a secondary consideration.

On the question of whether the Quad should be expanded, 68% of respondents thought it was a bad idea as it could undermine the need to establish a convergence of interests and objectives. Some of the respondents elaborated, saying that they think that the Quad should avoid becoming ‘another ASEAN’.

Based on these findings, Quad members and their regional partners—including ASEAN states—should focus more on exploring beneficial forms of cooperation. As a first step, the Quad nations need to agree on a set of common objectives and actionable goals. They need to recognise that while there is a considerable appetite for a successful Quad, there will be little continued enthusiasm if the Quad fails (again).

Given that most ASEAN respondents think that the Quad actually complements the existing regional architecture, the report recommends that ASEAN leaders explore channels for cooperation and coordination, particularly in the areas where there is broad consensus. After all, Southeast Asia as a whole needs to make more of an effort to sustain peace, stability and prosperity—not less. Quad members, in turn, should recognise the centrality of ASEAN’s role and not seek to create another ASEAN-like institution in the region.

For print readers, the original piece with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/support-for-the-quad-outweighs-scepticism-in-southeast-asia>.

The great Indo-Pacific misread

Malcolm Cook, 1 November 2018

Dhruva Jaishankar's [recent Strategist post](#) and Huong Le Thu's [ASPI special report](#) are useful correctives to the widespread misreading of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. That infrequent, irregular meetings of (not the most) senior officials from the US, Japan, India and Australia are [seen as](#) a threat to ASEAN centrality and/or a containment device against China tells us more about particular ASEAN and Chinese sensitivities than it does about the Quad. ASEAN organises dozens of regular meetings at this same level every year, and all of them rightfully pass by with little or no mention.

The overanalysis of the Quad and the cognitive trap behind it have coloured analysts' interpretations of current concepts of the Indo-Pacific region. The international relations analysis of the 'region' in this part of the world has been captured by a particular understanding of that term that suits the power-enhancing interests of ASEAN, the states of Southeast Asia, and China quite well.

In this version of reality, regions are created and maintained by formal regional organisations that states are invited to join or not. Moreover, despite an expanding array of anomalies—including [APEC](#), the [Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank](#), [ReCAAP](#), and the recently activated [Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership](#)—ASEAN is and should always be at the centre of any region that includes Southeast Asia. Hence, the interstate institutions that give meaning to these wider regions should be ASEAN-plus bodies. Kevin Rudd's 2008 Asia-Pacific Community proposal was read as ignoring this first principle and [was declared](#) 'dead in the water'.

'Inclusivity' is often presented as the second core principle of regionalism in this part of the world. In practice, however, the inclusivity principle is applied very selectively. It routinely excludes Taiwan, Mongolia and Pacific island countries, and at times the US, India, Australia and New Zealand. Indonesia's conception of the Indo-Pacific [enunciated](#) by Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa in 2013 and its [revision](#) under Joko Widodo's administration reflect this predominant view, with the ASEAN-led East Asia Summit seen as the central Indo-Pacific regional body.

The conflation of ASEAN-led regionalism with the region also misinforms many of the criticisms of the Indo-Pacific canvassed by Jaishankar and Le Thu. In this view, the Quad is the potential core organising mechanism of the Indo-Pacific that breaks both of the hallowed principles. The Indo-Pacific concept is [disparaged](#) and frequently written off for not respecting ASEAN centrality and excluding [China](#). Some critics go further and argue that the concept is best left with ASEAN to develop.

These criticisms misread the Indo-Pacific regional concepts of the individual Quad nations and of the Quad itself, which are more the opposite of the predominant view of the region than a failed attempt to reproduce it. The Indo-Pacific concepts being defined separately but discussed together by the US, Japan, India and Australia and the informal, irregular nature of the Quad are overlapping responses to the shortcomings of the ASEAN-led selectively inclusive regional architecture.

It is unlikely that the Quad will become a formal regular institution among even the four members to the east, west, north and south of Southeast Asia or seek to expand by inviting Southeast Asian nations to join. The 'Indo-Pacific' is likely to remain what it is today, comprising four overlapping views of:

- the main arena of strategic concern for the US, Japan, India and Australia labelled in geographic terms
- the identification of the same major power, China, whose current behaviour poses the greatest strategic challenge
- a commitment to global principles that are under challenge
- the desire to seek out areas of greater cooperation with 'like-minded' states through bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral (or bigger) arrangements.

The Indo-Pacific concepts' real message to China is that its aggressive behaviour in the Indo-Pacific is creating the opposite of harmony, a sense of common destiny, or a win-win situation. For ASEAN, the message is that the current regional architecture is a means for and not the end of regional cooperation, particularly for non-ASEAN member states. For ASEAN and China, the most productive response to the Indo-Pacific and the Quad may be self-criticism and not denial.

For print readers, the original piece with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-great-indo-pacific-misread>.

Indonesia and the Quad: can't or won't decide?

Shafiah F. Muhibat and M. Habib Abiyan Dzakwan, 7 December 2018

Huong Le Thu's [recent study](#) on Southeast Asian perceptions of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the informal grouping of the US, Japan, Australia and India, commonly known as the Quad) found that Indonesians were among the most ambivalent towards it.

In response to the question, 'Do you support the Quad?', more than 50% of Indonesians surveyed chose, 'Not now, but maybe in the future'. If we assume that the survey result reflects Indonesia's approach to regional dynamics, was the proportion of undecided respondents high because they weren't able to make up their minds, perhaps due to lack of information? Or was it because they felt that indecision was the more favourable stance?

When Mohammad Hatta coined Indonesia's *bebas dan aktif* ('free and active') foreign policy doctrine in 1948, it was generally hailed as the most appropriate response for a newly independent state to the superpower rivalry of the Cold War. Whereas *bebas* (often also translated as 'independent') meant staying outside of any binding military bloc, *aktif* meant vigorously battling colonialism and promoting world peace.

Adhering to these principles, Indonesia navigated the regional dynamics shaped by the Cold War and sought to keep the Southeast Asian region neutral in the bipolar rivalry by choosing not to ally with any blocs. That approach is illustrated by President Sukarno's decision to found the non-aligned movement in 1955 and by President Suharto's determination to keep ASEAN at a distance from great-power contestation after its establishment in 1967.

But the free-and-open policy wasn't just fitting as a response to global dynamics; it was also the right choice for Indonesia, which lacked capacity in most of the sectors that would enable a stronger foreign policy, such as economic development, military capability and a stable political system. From that perspective, it was the cheapest and safest option.

Indonesia has continued to adhere to that doctrine. Even with no more blocs to choose from in the post-Cold War era, it still feels the need to declare itself free. And even though it has reached middle-income status and is acknowledged as one of the world's highly developed countries through its membership of the G20, it still chooses the cheapest and safest option of not making affirmative decisions in many world affairs. Its approaches and policies on issues like the [Rohingya crisis](#), China's [militarisation of the South China Sea](#), and the internment of [Uyghurs](#) are some examples that come to mind. On some of these matters, 'free and active' seems to be more of an excuse for inaction than a principle.

As Le Thu's survey showed, the Quad faces some perception problems, including a common view that it antagonises China and challenges ASEAN. A total of 54% of all respondents saw the Quad as an 'anti-China bulwark'. Having participated in various discussions on Indo-Pacific and regional security involving Indonesia's policy and expert communities, we conclude that this is the common perception in Indonesia as well.

However, only 22% of Indonesian respondents gave a clear 'No' answer when asked whether they supported the Quad. The majority were undecided. Playing the free-and-active card? Perhaps. Supporting the Quad would seem like leaning towards an alliance with the US, while bluntly rejecting it risks being interpreted as lending a supporting hand to China.

We acknowledge that it's not fair, or academically sound, to make this study the sole compass for our analysis of Indonesian foreign policy. But let's stick to this argument as we present another factor in Indonesia's often fuzzy approach to regional security, and ambivalent foreign policies in general.

We mentioned that domestic conditions were relevant to the free-and-active foreign policy, and they still are. The current administration has often been accused of assigning a low priority to foreign policy and therefore lacking a clear strategy for responding to regional dynamics. Discussions on the Indo-Pacific concept and the Quad come at a time when the nation is preparing itself for possibly the biggest national election in its history in 2019. And there are other more pressing items on the agenda, such as natural disasters and terrorism.

The Widodo government apparently avoids expending too much effort on foreign policy issues that aren't popular among its people, and the Quad is no exception. At the same time, the government is extra careful not to put too much attention on Indonesia's external relations so as not to provoke criticism from the opposition.

Taking these factors into account, an informal security framework such as the Quad doesn't have strong appeal for Indonesia. Indonesia is preparing its [own concept of the Indo-Pacific](#), which was introduced at the East Asia Summit in August (although so far it has had a lacklustre response, as seen in the mere mentions in the chairman's statements at the most recent [East Asia Summit](#) and [ASEAN summit](#)).

The Indo-Pacific concept that Indonesia proposes [is based on the following two principles](#): 'Not to create a new mechanism or replace an existing one, but to enhance cooperation using the existing mechanism', and 'to keep maintaining [ASEAN's] central role and mak[e] the Indo-Pacific region as an open, transparent, inclusive and respectful to international law and cooperative area by using the EAS mechanism as the main platform'.

From that description, we can deduce that the Quad isn't part of Indonesia's view of the Indo-Pacific. A straightforward rejection is unlikely to be included in any document explaining the concept, but the Indonesian government is going to shy away from engaging in further discussion of the Quad.

For print readers, the original piece with live links is at <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/indonesia-and-the-quad-cant-or-wont-decide>.

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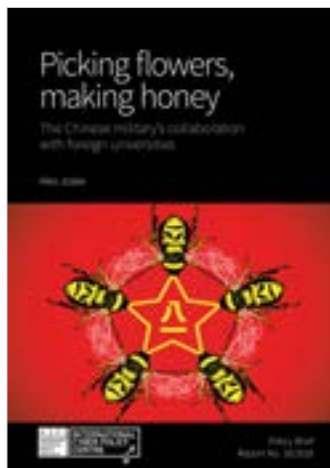
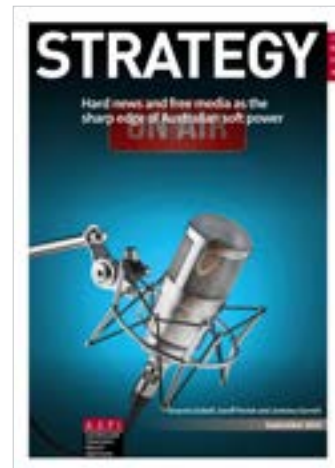
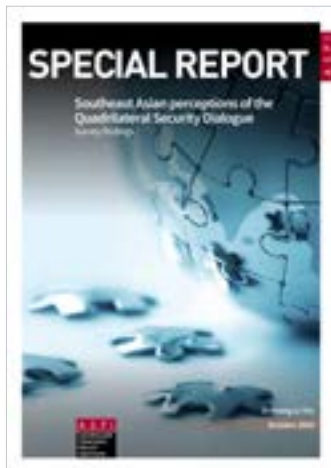
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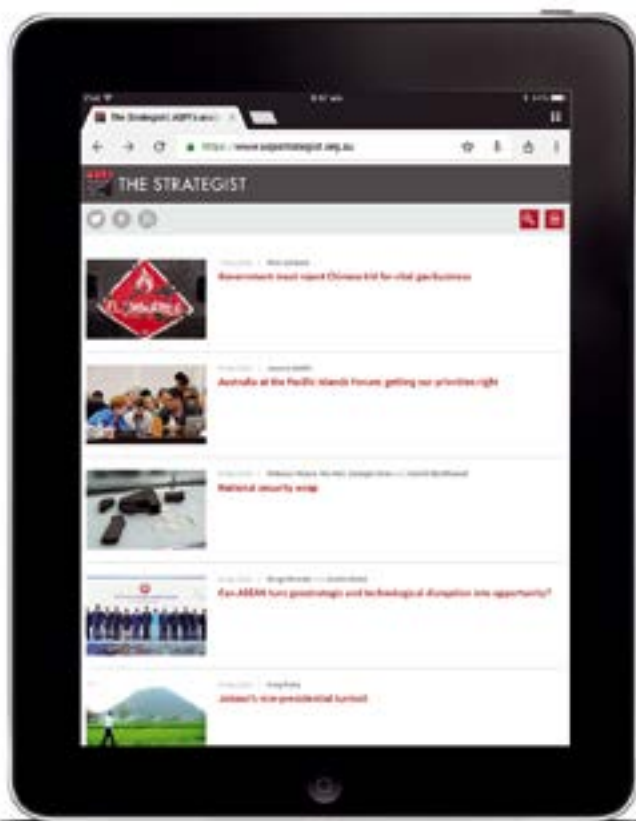


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