

THE HOT PEACE IN INDO-PACIFIC: CONTESTING QUADRILATERAL SECURITY DIALOGUE AGAINST CHINESE GEOPOLITICS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION

Hino Samuel Jose^a and Asep Kamaluddin Nashir^b

ABSTRACT

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is a strategy to contain China which has now reached the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) as part of the Chinese geostrategy in the Indo-Pacific to counterbalance US and western hegemony. The dynamics brought by the minilateral realm and bilateral conflicts within the Indo-Pacific have contributed to the shaping of the region's security architecture. This article discusses the contentions between India - China competition; ASEAN, Quad, and the implications to IOR; and how the Quad Plus notion is affecting further geopolitical deliberation in the Indo-Pacific. The article concludes that the Quad is an important platform for years ahead and the rising notion of the Quad Plus will remain as the future challenge for both sides. This may redefine the Indo-Pacific concept itself, however, it is assured that ASEAN will play as a collaborative agent to China and the Quad, while also prioritise their interests over the region.

Keywords: Quad, Indo-Pacific, China, geopolitics, Indian Ocean

INTRODUCTION

Realising the rising impacts of major power contestation in the region, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) - spearheaded by Indonesia, adopted the 2016 ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific to navigate ASEAN regionalism amid the hot global peace. The major power rivalry on the question of the South China Sea is caused by the importance of the region as a stepping stone and the sole strategic line that bridges the Pacific and Indian Ocean (Anwar D. F., 2020). Although most of the previous research concluded that the region is volatile and prone to polarisation (Putra, 2015), ASEAN is still optimistic to respond and establish concrete norms in managing the increased competition within the region. The characteristics of the region pose enormous and complex challenges in the Indo-Pacific security landscape. Hence, we need to understand that the strong gravitational force from the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects in ASEAN and the Chinese vision of the “String of Pearls” policies have shaped Chinese geopolitical interests to counterweight United States (US) rivalry within the Indo-Pacific architecture (Putra, 2017).

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The rising foreign intervention from China and the US was not the only reason for the emergence of the Indo-Pacific. The increasing regional groupings were also accompanied by the increased minilateral activities that affect the regional architecture. This idea was constructed as a more political security-linked notion based on the maritime geostrategy rather than the traditional conceptualisation of the Indo-Pacific that was linked to its predominant economic regionalism nowadays (Lee-Brown, 2018). Still, in the political spectrum, the four so-called “democratic diamonds” in the Asia-Pacific according to Shinzo Abe, are the key leaders of the Indo-Pacific reality in post-Asia Pacific emergence. The so-called “four democracies” referred to by Prime Minister Abe is the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) (Lee L. , 2016) which will be discussed in this paper. We can see that Abe was trying to convey his thoughts that the Quad is what drives the big power competitions to the Indo-Pacific as the Quad versus China, alongside with each of their own allies, will try to gain the security of Asia-Pacific in the Indo-Pacific theatre. Hall (2017) and Mohan and Medcalf (2017) argued that the minilateral building between India, Japan, and Australia, with the US being excluded from the trilateral group, reflects that military connectivity may still thrive, however, the trilateral cooperation itself was useless because the practical middle power efforts are obstructed (Lee-Brown, 2018) due to political and security concerns.

The nexus between the Indo-Pacific, ASEAN, and the increased major power polarisation has always been dragged into the same intersectional discourse. Although the Indo-Pacific concept might not have been universally recognised, it was already becoming a trend-setter for the other major power allies like Japan, South Korea, Canada, India, and Russia to adopt the Indo-Pacific strategy that was embracing their foreign policy stance. The strategic space of the region is now being redefined as the big players' game room amidst the fragmented debates on its construction (Saputra & Sudirman, 2020). The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is also part of the geopolitical contestation. This will also be discussed further in this paper. The IOR should be concerned as it is sharing the sovereign territorial waters of ASEAN states such as Indonesia, Malaysia (with the adjacent Malacca Strait), and Myanmar; while the IOR is also becoming the important geostrategy of India, Australia and the US as those countries share the same member states with the US within the Quad. The clashing interest here is the presence of ASEAN countries with their interest in centralising ASEAN's role and proposition on the IOR in facing the changing regional architecture (Saputra & Sudirman, 2020) and the Quad allies coming to counteract China as the IOR bridges the “free and repressive” world that has been used by China to induce their militaristic and political achievements beyond their yard (Ayres, 2019).

Other than geopolitics and security matters, the IOR is also categorised by the World Food Programme as a region prone to non-traditional issues (food and health insecurity) where maritime security and states' connectivity became the top priority that affects the people (Putten, 2014). Therefore, it made the region an important area for the strategic maritime objective to those actors who are aiming to secure their own maritime resources interest. The IOR kept its rich biodiversity and enormous blue economy potential, and a key contender of ocean environmental and human security (Kapan, 2011). Additionally, the adjacent South Asian continent in the north, the great Australian continent in the southern part, the Southeast Asian region to the east, and the African Coast in the

west made the IOR the vital area for its surrounding countries' maritime access (Cattopadhyay, 2010).

Speaking on the practical side, the IOR is a pivotal point for global maritime trade route as it comprises 40 percent of the world's crude oil supply from the middle east to the rest of Asia-Pacific, and this has been part of the US attention to secure the oil supply (US EIA, 2017). For China, its dependency on maritime trade is also the key contention on China's counterbalance in the IOR as most of its oil supplies come from the middle east through the IOR trade route. The insecurity of the trade route means jeopardy to China's national interest as the country is dependent on oil supply (Khan, Imran, & Iqbal, 2019). With the existence of a strategic maritime line in the IOR, China needs to secure their 90 percent goods because the sea route is the only door for them to acquire national prosperity. Indeed, the presence of the Quad will challenge China after referring to themselves as the key player in global governance (Zhongying, 2016). In regards to the intertwined and intersectional problems, the IOR is now moving into a new period where it has become the favorite, and prime characteristics of insecurity and instability caused by the polarisation and dysfunctional regime will increase disobedience and challenges to the rule of law in the IOR.

QUADRILATERAL SECURITY DIALOGUE IN A GLANCE

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or "Quad" in short, is a strategic security partnership between the US, India, Japan, and Australia in a form of informal cooperation. Informal cooperation here refers to cooperation without any standing secretariat and fixed regime like ASEAN, EU, and the UN, which made Quad more identical with the G7 or G20. The cooperation itself was established in 2007 to maintain peace and security amid the rising geopolitical and strategic security competition among countries for resources and other advantages (Hawkins, 2021). This cooperation is more centric in the form of naval partnership and having the desire to promote a free Indo-Pacific, as some of the propositions of the Quad were also aligned with the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (Singh, 2020). The Quad itself maintains that the connectivity and friendly relations among the major democratic powers in the Asia-Pacific need to be preserved, and one of its implementations was the annual commencement of the "Malabar Exercise". Although the naval exercise is being excused to promote the readiness of the forces, many still argue that the extensive naval presence is also aimed to deter China's advancing posture in the Indo-Pacific, and as the primary US foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific maritime security order (Vasudewa, 2020). Table 1 below summarises the overall manpower and firepower of all four Quad member states index taken from Global Firepower as per June 2021.

Table 1: Quad member states firepower overview (2021)

RANK	COUNTRY NAME	DEFENSE BUDGET	MANPOWER	INDEX RANKING (GLOBAL FIREPOWER)
1.	United States of America	740.5 billion USD	2,245,500 (1.4 million active, 845,000 on reserve)	Rank 1 (0.0718)
2.	Republic of India	73.65 billion USD	5,127,000 (1.4 million active, 2.5 million paramilitary and 1.1 million on reserve)	Rank 4 (0.1207)
3.	State of Japan	51.7 billion USD	319,000 (250,000 active, 55,000 on reserve, and 14,000 paramilitaries)	Rank 5 (0.1599)
4.	Commonwealth of Australia	42.7 billion USD	80,000 (60,000 active, 20,000 on reserve)	Rank 19 (0.3378)

Source: *Global Firepower, 2021*

On the ASEAN vision and regional interest in the Indo-Pacific, research from Darwis (2020) argued that ASEAN centrality is the main relevant contention to bind all actors contesting on the region in adhering to the norms and principles. This adherence can be perceived as an effort for ASEAN to centralise its role through a more collaborative consultation approach rather than by frontal militaristic efforts in balancing power (Darwis, 2020). Moving to the geopolitical matters of the Indo-Pacific, Ejaz and Javaid (2018) argued that most of the discussions on the question of Indo-Pacific geopolitics have always been based on the BRI's rationale and China's increasing naval forces presence in the region (Ejaz & Javaid, 2018). Kumar (2020) concluded with a more historical context of Indo-Pacific geopolitics that the literature dated in the ancient Indian era - "Kautlaya", explained that intellectual power, physical power, and sovereignty are the key matters in explaining the baseline of the rising contemporary Indo-Pacific.

Further elaboration by Graaff and Apeldoorn (2018) argued that the tremendous rivalry between China and the US was also an important consideration for ASEAN to secure their regional harmony from being hindered, while Pu and Wang (2018) argued that the rising Chinese influence will get the region closer to open confrontation if there are no concrete solutions taken to action. In regards to non-traditional maritime concerns and securitisation, Aswani (2020) discussed the contentions on the developmental and contemporary threats in the IOR that would eventually impact the maritime resources and

strategic contentions at play that are being competed by various member states. In regards to geopolitical issues within the frame of energy security, the Indo-Pacific and US nexus, and the importance of maritime silk road concept, research by Khan et al (2019) elaborated those contentions.

It was argued that the intertwined narrative and connection established in the context of China's 21st century security agenda eventually led to the economic and influence boom that challenged the US order in the Indo-Pacific. It was argued that China was crafting the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) as part of their policy in shaping the IOR in post-US order while diverging strategic interests to increase naval competition and shifting the Chinese multipart vision in the IOR (Khan, Imran, & Iqbal, 2019). Lastly, on the question of the agenda-setting and possible scenario in the IOR maritime security architecture, Cordner (2010) argued that the declining US presence, the increasing competition between China and India, and the environmental and food security accessibility should be done through special arrangements and regime institutional involvement. A previous study by Jose (2021) also complemented that the ASEAN efforts in countering Chinese hegemony is pretty much dependable on how ASEAN would navigate its way forward, especially in perceiving the BRI as one of the contenders in ASEAN political resolution on many prolonged regional issues.

This research employs qualitative analysis to elaborate on the contentions based on case studies and previous research and works of literature through document-based and internet-based research to construct the analysis. The data is interpreted to analyse, understand and argue the Quad's presence and China's geopolitical interest in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the IOR. According to Bryman (2008) in his book, the qualitative method is used to elaborate the context and relation between theories and arguments established within the analysis. Qualitative research allows the writer to analyse, compare, and disseminate arguments from secondary sources of data from documents and works of literature (Lamont, 2015). The research questions that are being discussed in this paper are as follows: (1) How have China and the Quad impacted the IOR's regional architecture?; (2) What are the implications of the presence of the Quad as part of the Indo-Pacific spectrum to ASEAN?; and (3) How can the Quad Plus notion further impact the Indo-Pacific, especially in the IOR?

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

India-China Rivalry and the Quad Implication to the IOR

Beginning with the discussion within this paper, it is important to start with the two strategic and the most prolonging contracting competitors in all political, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions – which are China and India. China is the common rival of the Quad member states itself and it led to many publications of each own Indo-Pacific concept. The People's Republic of China's grip in the Indo-Pacific has always been the subject of discourses and scrutiny, not only by the western bloc, but also ASEAN as its immediate regional partner. Previous research may argue that the current competition

between China and India tends to be one-sided as it will depend on how Indian domestic leadership maintains their rationale. However, do remember that it is challenging enough to prevent full-blown armed clashes as both countries struggle with military capabilities, especially India, against its well-armed neighborhood (both politically and economically), which is China itself.

During Modi's leadership, India tries to evade a confrontational conflict and tries to shift into a more limited external balancing, selective partnership, and synchronising their foreign policy in the asymmetrical status quo (Pardesi M. , 2021). Just like its predecessors, India focuses on Tibet and the Himalayan region to secure and deter any possible confrontation on the borderline. What is concerned about this securitisation act is not about India's relocation of its troops within the border, but is the concern whether India will have to scale up their nuclear weapon or will just balance its mere conventional forces (Pardesi, 2017).

To eliminate the supposition of the state actors competing for their geopolitics, the obstacles shall be removed. These probable obstacles are the extensive usage of language, religion, ethnicity, and culture; and the historical experiences that shaped its political development and its country's fate (Rahman, 2011). The competing powers like India and China tried to establish political solutions through diplomatic efforts, however, the rivalry and the absence of a particular regime within a set institution (Anwar, 2015) had obstructed the efforts to bring the contracting actors into one negotiation table. China and India are historical rivals with the little-to-no possibility of bringing both parties under one strategic and cooperative mediation table. People might generally understand that there are no possible converging points for both countries to be cooperative based on their historical tension, however, there is a possible scenario for it. The navigation of India's foreign policy to secure its energy resource access from the surrounding Chinese influence within the Indo-Pacific has led the country to be more cooperative somehow rather than weighing on aggressive posture (Chen, 2018). This is possible because the consistent demand from both countries in regards to energy will increase largely within a few years to come (Garver, 2020). India has realised that China's overwhelming influence in Africa and Central Asia through the BRI leaves no option aside from weighing their rational standing towards China to prevent the lack of access given to Indian energy firms.

Although this may breeze some cool air amid the bilateral tension, this should not be seen as mere possible peace efforts because India's foreign policy on energy diplomacy is shaped by its geopolitical surroundings, and it depends also on how fast China is steaming ahead towards the gulf with the presence of India on its maritime route in the IOR. In addition, the Indian loss on the Kashgar oilfield back in 2013 reflected that on many fronts, India was and is currently struggling to counterweigh the pressing matters from the Chinese manoeuvre (Chauhan, 2019). Both India and China are aiming for a different target, where China is also concerned with anti-piracy matters in the IOR, hence increasing their participation in the PLA naval operation under the IOR Association (IORA) to secure the region. The engagement of infrastructure investment and development assistance to Seychelles and the Maldives can be seen as a tangible Chinese footprint in the central IOR sub-region, which can be seen as the Chinese so-called "look

to the west” notion (Parmar, 2013). In regards to India’s identification of interests in the IOR, although there is no militaristic confrontation until this paper is written, India is more concerned with their securitisation against contemporary threats from non-state actors like piracy and maritime terrorism in the IOR.

Additionally, the Sino-Indian rivalry is also interfered with by a strong US’ allies presence in the region through the Quad. Not only that, the yielding power from the G8 to the G20 had led to China, India, Russia, and the US competing to have a larger say in the political landscape. The rivalry between India and China is a considerable contention when discussing the multilateral preservation in the Asia-Pacific. With Modi standing firm with ASEAN in supporting a rule-based order, we can see that the Indo-Pacific concept of India was still aspired by the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). The Shangri-La dialogue for instance has to become a bridge for both bilateral and regional efforts in convening security-related dialogue that can unite India, China, the US, and other relevant parties in one platform (Panda, 2020). Consistent and in line with the bilateral tension of India-China, Beijing will always be feeling antagonised as long as India and the Quad as a whole is existing and substantially trying to take the upper hand in the Indo-Pacific (Envall, 2019).

The Quad in the Indo-Pacific: Implication to the IOR from the Case of ASEAN

Beginning with the Quad, the questions of what is and how it could impact the Indo-Pacific needs to be perceived with either two of possible prejudices that have always been surfacing in the discourse. First, the Quad is usually perceived as a mere military collaboration effort to mitigate natural disasters and securing the strategic ties between US allies in the Asia-Pacific theatre. Second, the Quad perhaps is seen as a cooperation to promote the middle ground and common belief of the strategic democratic powerhouse in Asia, as this was coined by Japanese PM Shinzo Abe (Ashok, 2018). From these two perceptions, the first notion seems to be more suitable when reflecting on the status quo, as the increasingly stronger China is now challenging US primacy and pursuing a more muscular foreign policy to counterattack the west hegemony. With Xi Jinping raising his hand against the west, and calling for the establishment of the Asian Security Framework to get the western hand out of Asia, the US is starting to be more concerned in revisiting their influence to be stronger (Wuthnow, 2014). Chinese concern is even more proof to be serious when China imposed economic sanctions against South Korea because of their Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THADD) missile system establishment, which was accused by China as an American-driven securitisation. We need to understand that back then THADD was a bilateral headache for China as the system would disrupt Chinese drone operation and its rockets (Tias, 2020) whilst standing as the next-door neighbour of North Korea and the surrounding US alliance in East Asia.

It was evident enough that the presence of the Quad in the IOR is just an informal operationalisation of the strategic vision against China, however, we can also see that the Quad will become an inter-regional kind of NATO that will increase China’s concern against the US (Satake, 2020). The most sensible narrative is that the invitation of the US to the other European countries, or by trying to unite minilateral interactions, will just

outweigh China even more. Indeed with Chinese disobedience, lives will be at risk as China tends to be more firm and willing to take charge against the US with their current political pace (Lee L. , 2020). The presence of the Quad was also aimed for a better analysis of a strategic, cooperative, strong, and stable military power as China is now upgrading itself against the US and Japan on their eastern front, Australia on their southern front, and India on their western-southern front.

When we talk about the defense budget of the Quad member states, it becomes imperative for China to consider its inter-regional geopolitical steps further, because it determines the outcome if somehow in any situation they had a stand-off against one another with any of the Quad's forces. The modernisation of Chinese armament has always been a concern by many scholars, and even to the US itself because it will imply a different signal for further US policies on China and the Indo-Pacific as a whole (Cimbala S. J, 2015). Not limited to US policy implications, Chinese military modernisation, according to Cimbala (2015) in a different research, China's military is a balancer between the east and the west, involving Russia as the bridge in Eurasia. Because of its multi-vectored military policies (Cimbala, 2015), China is also playing its game to maintain its nuclear deterrence while practically keeping the region safe as the US, North Korea, and the whole ASEAN (their strategic partner) are very sensitive when it comes to nuclear weapons. Chinese battle doctrine (the so-called A2/AD strategy) which comprised of "anti-access" (preventing enemies from entering the operational field) and "area-denial" (suppressing the enemy by limiting their movement) is now a considerable challenge for the US itself (Czajkowski, 2018). Although Chinese military equipment may not be as advanced as those of the average Quad countries and even the US itself, China is still able to level the playing field in the maritime front to secure their interests in the IOR.

On the political aspect, the joint military exercise conducted by the Quad countries has been a consistent diplomatic complaint from China ever since 2007. Back then, the Quad countries tried to utilise the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to coordinate further maritime security development in the Indo-Pacific (Nicholson, 2007). If we subject ASEAN position that is consistent with the AOIP, then it is feasible enough to conclude that the Quad's presence as China's counterbalance and ASEAN external partner states will provoke China and its allies in ASEAN. This paper assumes that Myanmar, Vietnam, and Cambodia are having their tendency more towards China, reflecting from their stance within the discussion of the Myanmar crisis itself. Chinese intervention in intra-ASEAN affairs has somehow shaped the tendency of member states in voicing their views against the breach of the AOIP vision. Furthermore, we need to also understand that the proliferation of BRI has eventually led countries to be swallowed by Chinese geopolitical advancement and developmentalism that was based on the "Beijing Consensus". To contain the US' overwhelming military power, China has to approach with soft power to countries as concrete economic diplomacy to gradually eliminate their dependency on western power. This was proven by the rapid increase of the BRI from 2006-2017 (Ukpe, 2020) where Chinese financing seems to be a lubricant for geopolitical purposes in the region as ASEAN is the only gateway for the US in approaching the Indo-Pacific.

The Quad has always been exercising its naval power and one controversial venue was the Malabar exercise in November 2020 in the South China Sea. The exercise provoked China because the Quad naval forces were trying to meddle with Chinese militarisation of the South China Sea (SCS) (Spratly Island and other man-made reclamation in the SCS). The narrative where China remains pessimistic about the Quad will always be there as long as their naval exercise keeps provoking China, and the US' assertive muscular policy against China is still existent (Bowman & Montgomery, 2020). We argue that the Chinese unilateral claim in the SCS will be the homework for the Quad in keeping ASEAN's mutual interest at play and not harmed as the consequences of the Quad's efforts in meddling with China in the SCS. This is because ASEAN tends to be more collaborative in resolving the dispute through the ongoing Code of Conduct (COC) and the old Declaration on Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), while the Quad tends to be more militaristic. The different stream of policies will eventually impact ASEAN's vision in navigating their regionalism amid a multipolar world and may pose further costly political deadlock. The point is, if the Quad manages to deter China, this will not only impact ASEAN in terms of their political efforts to resolve the SCS disputes, but also increasing China's aggressive coast guard patrol on the disputed areas as China has adopted its new Coast Guard Act.

For us to not sway away from the IOR context, the expansionist Chinese strategy in Eurasia, the IOR, Africa, and ASEAN has made those developing countries dependent on Chinese investment. The focal point of the IOR as part of US key hegemonic sustainability (O'Neil & West, 2020) means the same door for China to unlock the key to open the door and enthroning themselves (China) as the new hegemonic power in the region. The fragmented stance of many Indo-Pacific states and the failure to address the SCS issue in 2012 is also a narrative that should not be forgotten as it will set the precedent of another related issue (Green, 2014), and in this context is the IOR architecture with China and the Quad competition within it. The ASEAN viewpoint where their centrality and bridge-builder role will not only affect its external partner in Southeast Asia, but also to the IOR. The point is, the combination of major and middle powers in the Quad will also shape the other ASEAN states, aside from Indonesia and Malaysia, who might not be interested in the IOR at all like the Philippines. With the BRI being blamed by many research before as the key root cause and hotspot of regional fragmentation (or perhaps we can refer to it as "minilateralism"), China and the US will always compete to influence a key "grey" country that has a potential to disrupt each others' geopolitical advancement (Cronin, 2020).

On the question of further deepening the IOR response itself, based on the previous narratives, we can conclude that the IOR will then have to choose sides and determine their allies and rivals. ASEAN may stand still with their stance in the AOIP spearheaded by Indonesia to remain neutral on the IOR front, however, Bangladesh for instance, has to worry since their journey to join the Quad will not be smooth after China warned them in May 2021 (Mohan C. R., 2021). We can see that although Bangladesh may gain profit from the Quad to showcase their naval sovereignty in the IOR – they cannot join as they are bound to play by China's order under the disguise of the BRI. Additionally, all actors either ASEAN, US, or even the rest of the Quad member states themselves have to be concerned

with the significant growth of the Chinese military, and in five years, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) might be the contender against the might of American firepower, which means there will be a challenge as the induction of US forces will be tight and competitive (Sulaeman, 2020).

The Notion of Quad Plus Arrangement and its Implication to the Indo-Pacific

Not only China, India, the US, ASEAN, the rest of the Quad countries and European countries are also interested in the IOR region. This will drag further issues because if the European Union (EU) is involved, then it will also drag Moscow to the game. Both China and Russia are strong contenders against the western European major powers. Hence, the Quad and China themselves need to calculate the cost and benefit of bringing these players into the same room (Mohan G. , 2020). Aside from Europe, several Asian countries like South Korea, Vietnam, and New Zealand that were invited to the Quad 2.0 meeting (Jha, 2021) are now seen as a signal that the Quad is trying to put China and its allies into a deficit position. For China, the navigation of their BRI to Europe through Eurasia, and the politicised human rights agenda involving Xinjiang depicts the enormous European potential threat to Chinese navigation. We can see now that India and the other 3 Quad countries are trying to sort out the obstacles found in pushing their vital cooperation and positioning themselves to be aligned based on their (Quad member states) own perception of Indo-Pacific strategy. One thing for sure, this is very different from ASEAN which always tries to solve issues with pacificism.

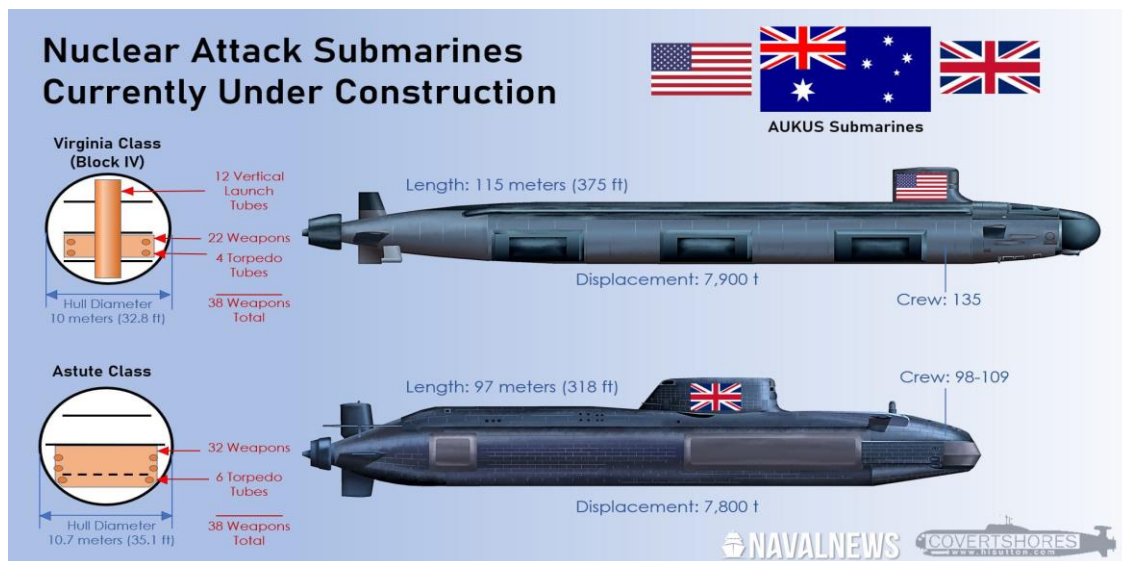
However, the European presence in the Quad Plus notion and the expansion to Southeast and East Asian countries cannot just be reflected as mere collaborative efforts to contain China, but also to close the gaps in connecting minilateral collaboration to achieve mutual interests. Therefore, what China can do is to invite Russia to join the party to handle the European front and secure both Sino-Russian interests over the region, while at the same time, China and Russia should also create a balance of power together against a western grip through routine Russia-China military exercises in the Yellow Sea, Kavkaz, Tsent, and Vostok since 2015 (Conley, et al, 2021).

As for New Zealand and Australia, these countries are going to be the vital actors in assisting the Quad's efforts from the southern front in the IOR. Australia is already tensed enough with China especially during the recent China-Australia trade war where China slammed tariffs on Australia's exports after Australia canceled both the 5G and BRI investments in the Australian mainland (Wood, 2021). With regard to New Zealand, the country seems to be pragmatic in their approach to the Indo-Pacific. New Zealand tends to be more neutral and adopt a safe policy just as Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) member states try to not being used by the major powers. However, we cannot forget the fact that Washington is the only insurance for Wellington's security in the region since they improved their bilateral relationship in 1980 (Murdoch, 2019). Research by Hijar-Chiapa (2020) concluded that Wellington is having a good and warm relation with all Quad member states, however, the unilateral statement from New Zealand's Chief of Defense Force in 2018 during his working visit to Delhi had shown that New Zealand was still

sorting out and weighing the proposition of them joining the alliance and how it could be a solid foundation (Hijar-Chiapa, 2020).

The recent development of AUKUS (Australia, UK, and US trilateral partnership) brought a new chapter, where the procurement of eight nuclear-powered submarines for Australia would mean something in Indo-Pacific confidence-building, especially when we are perceiving it from the Chinese perspective. There are not much to predict on AUKUS, since the follow-up and the circulated arguments were all based on predictions. So far, the authors argue that AUKUS and the Quad will be a complementary instrument for the new US pivot to Asia, and we are going to expect more also from the newly adopted EU 2021 Indo-Pacific Cooperation strategy. Preventive diplomacy will become a favorite discourse in the Quad 2.0 era, and what matters are how the Indo-Pacific central actor, namely ASEAN, can utilise the ASEAN-led mechanisms, either through ASEAN+1, ASEAN+3, East Asia Summit, or the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to promote preventive diplomacy, and responding to the increasing unilateralism that will sway away ASEAN-led integrity on their political consensus.

Picture 1: The Main Model of AUKUS Submarine Project

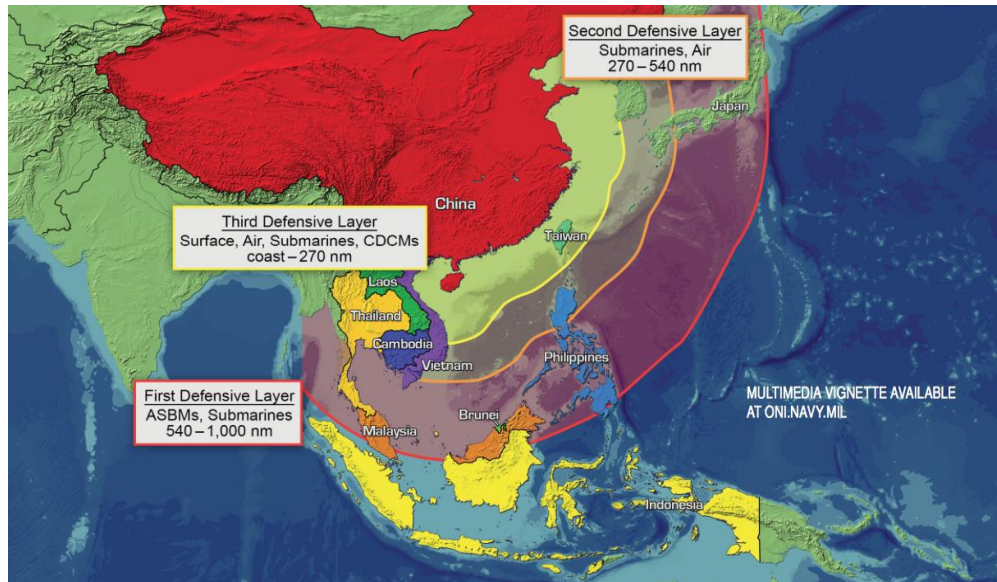


Source: Naval News (2021)

The procurement of these submarines will eventually impact the Chinese Anti-Area/Area Defense (A2/AD) strategy, where the operational, theatrical, and technical operations of Chinese naval forces are. As seen in the picture below, Chinese strategy and tactics will respond to the increasing submarine activities as expected from AUKUS procurement and the intervention of the western powers on maintaining the freedom of navigation and rule-based order agenda on the South China Sea, and to also block China from expanding towards the IOR, as that would be China's next target - to secure their interest in expanding towards the African and Middle East region. For ASEAN, of course, this will impact the principles of non-proliferation and self-restraint from power projection

as stipulated on the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), Zone of Peace and Neutrality (ZOPFAN), and the Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (SEANWFZ).

Picture 2: Chinese A2/AD Mapping on the Indo-Pacific



Source: Tertia & Perwita, 2018

East Asian Regional Security: The Case of South Korea and Japan on the Quad

South Korea is well known for its reluctance in bandwagoning with the Quad against China. On many sensitive issues, Seoul opted for a friendlier posture with the Quad by limiting their cooperation only in non-traditional cooperation, such as on climate change, development, and other people-centric issues. Previous studies argued that the Blue House does not seem to be interested in the Quad's aggressive agenda, and one may assume that this is because Seoul is facing a standoff with China's key ally, North Korea - with its 1 million troops less than 90km away from Seoul. However, Seoul is still maintaining a warm and friendly relation with the US, their main security assurance against the Kim Jong Un Nuclear regime, by justifying the intertwined common ground of South Korea's New Southern Policy (NSP) and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision (Ford, 2020). The authors argue that this refocusing of regional geostrategy from Seoul reflects a significant meaning that the Korean government has a higher stake in maintaining a friendly relation with Beijing owing to their economic ties and purportedly stalling their bilateral relation. The author argues that Seoul does not want to rely on western assurance as they seek a safer room and a constructive role rather than blatantly countering Beijing who is the key ally of their North Korean counterpart. To seek further correlation between Seoul's rationale and their geoeconomic and geopolitical linkages, the author will elaborate on the determining factors. Textually, this was explained by Klare (2001) who introduced the concept of determining factors of member states rationale in fulfilling their industrial and economic interests through three main situations: (1) an insatiable demand that cannot

be fulfilled if there are no major changes on macro and micro policy issues; (2) preventing the looming risk of shortages that eventually cause the national resources to be depleted; and (3) the need to expand or necessarily mobilise their forces to control the needed resources that are situated in a certain unstable/ contested region, in which a peaceful and safe status quo are needed as it is intertwined with the shifting geography of a conflict (Klare, 2001). To conclude, bringing the Quad 2.0 for Seoul is not a mere political contestation and power projection in the Indo-Pacific, but is how it eventually impacted their survival, with quite a notable gap with Japan on their defense, and the consistent threat from North Korean nuclear program less than 100km from Seoul. For sure, maintaining a warm relation through non-traditional cooperation with the Quad would benefit them, but Seoul is yet ready enough to be independent of their rival's encirclement. If the Quad wants to involve Seoul together with Japan to contest against China, they are going to need more and it will pose a different policy prescription for Washington on their ability to fulfill it or not.

Moving forward to Japan, we all know that the Quad faces a reality where Tokyo is eager enough and willing to take a deeper role by explicitly supporting Taiwan, which is against the One China Policy. Although this has yet to be formally embraced in Japanese official stance, the current warming relation with Taiwan would be credible enough as proof that Tokyo wishes to deliberate more concrete initiatives with Taiwan alongside the US in maintaining the strait's security as it is also the front gate of Japanese interest against China in Senkaku-Diaoyu islands (Liff, 2021). The Indo-Pacific nowadays for Tokyo is an important operational theatre, and they have been revisiting their Defense White Paper to cope with the trends and the increasing uncertainty posed by China and the shift in US leadership. There are several important things to note from the 2021 Japanese Defense White Paper, and what the authors can emphasise. First, Japan recognises the middle power role in increasing the connectivity in the Indo-Pacific and stipulates that issues like cybersecurity in the Indo-Pacific and Chinese 5G developments should be included in a bilateral discussion with the US to explore possible steps. Second, the multi-domain nature of the Japanese defense grand strategy has turned Tokyo's military ambition to be a bit more expansionist, however, it is still noteworthy that Article 8 of the Japanese Constitution would limit anything beyond self-defense force. It is sensible to predict it from the newest Defense White Paper, since Japan's bandwagoning with the Quad would require an extensive warlike defense and offense posture, rather than being a pragmatic actor in the sub-complex East Asian security architecture (Keyue & Xiaoqing, 2021). Tokyo has to also ensure that their engagement in the Quad, especially on the transfer of technology, defense industry, vaccine, and other non-traditional cooperation, should be able to coherently respond towards the shifting Asian security needs. In this regard, Japan is responding through military types of equipment donations to countries like Indonesia through multiple patrol boats that were specifically assigned to operate in the conflicted North Natuna Sea that shares a border with the South China Sea under the Chinese nine-dash line claim (Koga, 2020). This is done certainly to embrace the "Vientiane Vision" and specifically, to support the ASEAN countries maritime security efforts in maintaining their maritime sovereignty. The author sees Tokyo utilising this as their proxy and to push for a more positive sentiment from ASEAN partners towards the Quad that has always been seen

and judged by many as a threat to ASEAN centrality on their pacifist effort in the Indo-Pacific geopolitical rivalry.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the Quad is an important determinant of Chinese foreign policy and their geopolitical progress over the IOR region. Therefore, the US and their allies are having enough urgency to press China through Quad exercises as of now. However, rising China's power in the IOR and its grip against most of the member states through the BRI will eventually bring the Quad to be more assertive. It needs to be understood that the more assertive the Quad is towards China, the more vulnerable it is for ASEAN to maintain their holistic and pacifist settlement on their collaborative efforts on the South China Sea. Although as of now there are no ASEAN member states involved in counterbalancing China in the IOR through Quad, the signal coming from Vietnam will be a red alert for China as Vietnam is the only dependent neighbour in the region. Plus, Vietnam is the key gateway to Myanmar that connects Southeast Asia and the IOR, which is important for Chinese geostrategy. It may be too naive for ASEAN not secretly complimenting the Quad's action in the South China Sea to challenge the Chinese unilateral claim, however it is also an important task for ASEAN in their ambitious economic vision to integrate Asia-Pacific under the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) after the US's absence under Trump in the region. This may not directly be a causality towards the Quad dynamics, however, this is an indicator that ASEAN will always try to be the spearheader of the Indo-Pacific concept without jeopardising their economic interdependence.

ASEAN is upholding a clear outward-looking approach in the issue, and right now multiple discourses about foreign powers meddling in intra-ASEAN affairs shall be considered as part of the objective to determine the sustainability of the Quad-made movements. With Bangladesh being warned by China before their interest in joining Quad Plus, it is evident enough also to see that the US needs to increase its presence in the IOR by strengthening bilateral relations with the rest of the IOR member states. It cannot be denied that the BRI has become a strong Chinese megaphone economic diplomacy to stand against western hegemony. Therefore, the US should innovate its ways in creating interdependence that can be used to leverage their political interests and maintaining a stronghold via an intra-regional entity in the IOR. To conclude, the Quad is an important informal cooperation in the Indo-Pacific that will leave a footprint that China is not totally in control of, however, the status quo may change in five to ten years if the Chinese PLA ever becomes stronger. This will contest the notion of the US and its alliance power against China on multiple fronts, not only in the IOR, but also in Asia-Pacific as a whole. As always, the Quad will not be dissolved and will still be the favourite platform to deter and counterbalance each other (Zala, 2018).

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