

**RAUSI Research Brief Volume 2 Issue 1
March 2021**



Quadrilateral Security Dialogue in the Asia Pacific Region and its adaptation to maritime security issues in the Arctic Region; Part I

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Prepared for The Royal Alberta United Services Institute (RAUSI)
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Executive summary

This note is the first in a series that diagnoses the conditions for success of one of the means currently (2021) being employed to settle an international maritime dispute in the Asia Pacific region. The note's intent is to determine if and how such measures can successfully apply to other maritime disputes, such as those in the Arctic region. The means include multilateral diplomacy and bilateral treaty regimes. They test modalities of interpreting UN Charter Arts 2(4) and 51 concerning the threat or use of force in dispute settlement. The notes will inform those concerned with policy and law, multinational uniformed defence and security planning, and technology and capital equipment.

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is a forum of non-binding multilateral diplomacy whose participants include Australia, India, Japan and US, with at least one other state's participation pending. The Quad's express intention is to maintain a liberal rules-based international order in the Asia-Pacific region. Its intended outputs and outcomes are to mitigate geopolitical risks to the order's norms which may arise from other states' asserting expanding claims to prescriptive and enforcement jurisdictions in the region. The risks concern, for example, limited freedom of navigation in the South and East China Seas. The Quad has not expressly cited any such 'other state.' Notwithstanding, the People's Republic of China's advancing separate bilateral trade issues with each of the Quad's current members while concurrently pursuing its policy in domestic security and sovereignty may fracture unity of effort by the Quad and hence reduce its effectiveness. Further, China employs a historically grounded modality of interpretation of international law that shapes its geopolitical strategy. Japanese and US policy research suggests that bilateral Japan-US treaty-based diplomacy may prove as cost-effective in securing regional security as those of the more provocative multilateral 'Asian-NATO'-like Quad, whether per the Security Treaty Between the United States and Japan (1951), the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan (1960) or otherwise.

In the context of the Arctic region, identifying lessons from the Quad's experience and the necessary and sufficient conditions for its success may inform states who are asserting vital national interests in the region, and may assist in settling competing claims to jurisdiction. Comparative analysis.

1. Introduction

RAUSI takes note of a 28 January 2021 report that cites the United Kingdom (UK) may join the Australia-India-Japan-US Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.¹ The Quad is a forum of non-binding multilateral diplomacy that is currently focusing its diplomatic capital on security issues in the Indo-western Pacific and South East Asia. This report draws attention to the risk of heightening contentious vital national interests, strained multilateral diplomacy and problematic militarization throughout the region. The RAUSI note assesses the calculus of diplomacy employed by the Quad with focus on both procedural and substantive issues and the Quad's outputs and outcomes.

Part I of this note first overviews in §2 the earlier iterations of quads in general as an instrument of diplomacy to identify their common and distinct characters. §3 then diagnoses the Quad's short-lived 2007 rebranding concerning the western Pacific / Indo-Pacific.

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Part II of this note [forthcoming] will assess the more recently [2017] updated model of the Quad, including select trends and events in regional geopolitics. Further, it will identify procedural and substantive conditions for success in other quad-like arrangements that might be applied in other maritime security contexts. Part III of this note [forthcoming] will assess whether and how these conditionalities can influence outputs and outcomes of dispute settlement in another context, namely, the Arctic region.

2. Quads in earlier forms

2.1 Introduction

Diplomacy is one of the currencies of the international order, be it bi-, tri-, quadra-, quinquilateral diplomacy or otherwise. At least three models of quadrilateral diplomacy initiated during the late 20th and early 21st century introduce the focus of this note.

2.2 WTO

One earlier version of ‘the Quad’ is that which comprised the Ministers of Trade of major trading partners in the World Trade Organization (WTO). Formed in 1981, the quad was initially a ‘tri’ and comprised Japan, the United States, and the Commission of the European Union, but later became a ‘quad’ when Canada joined it. The Quad was only one of several coalitions of trading partners within the WTO that intended to advance common interests of its members within the WTO writ large. Other coalitions did likewise, such as the G-20 of developing countries.² However, following China’s 2001 admission to the WTO and China’s strength in negotiating trade treaties with individual members of the Quad, this particular Quad’s purpose dissipated.

2.3 QCG

A second version of ‘the Quad’ was the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) formed 11 January 2016 among Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States and China. It intended to advance the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation process.³ Success within the process has proved problematic due to inter alia the standing and conduct of the Taliban. Further, the omission of India, Iran and Russia as members in the process, each possessing a unique understanding of and standing with Afghanistan, has been critically noted in recent (2020) research.⁴

2.4 TCG

In contrast to such contexts of trade and regional security, that of humanitarian assistance framed quadrilateral diplomacy initiated by Australia, India, Japan, and the US on 26 December 2004. The Tsunami Core Group (TCG) coordinated with other states and agencies to provide humanitarian relief to areas impacted by the tsunami, which began off the west coast of the island of Sumatra, Indonesia and impacted the west coast of Aceh province, Indonesia and beyond to e.g., Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Africa. Aid totaled USD 6.25 billion⁵ accompanied by 40,000 troops.⁶ “[The TCG was formed because it] ... ‘had ...resources and...desire to act effectively and quickly.’ [It] was seen as a model for ad hoc collaboration by multiple countries, but quadrilateral engagement itself paused after it was disbanded.”⁷ Two weeks later, on 06 January 2005, the TCG was subsumed by UN relief operations.⁸

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2.5 Conclusions

Observations emerge from the last twenty-five-year history of quads. The data source may be too small to draw conclusions but sufficiently large to propose arguable hypotheses that can be tested in subsequent iterations of quads in later years, per §3 and §4 below.

1. Quads and other sized fora are flexible purpose-built fora and expedient tools of diplomacy. They are easy to form, may meet at any frequency for any duration of time and at any level, whether Head of State, Head of Government, Ministerial or lesser. Their agendas may be broadly or narrowly defined.
2. On the other hand, they may cease to be effective if and when Member States' domestic political agendas or other external agencies subordinate the quad's collective interests. This attribute suggests a quad's effectiveness is directly proportional to the degree of sustainable political will of the Member State that is most vulnerable to external agencies.
3. Quad's outputs are non-binding.
4. During the period when a quad remains extant, its strategy to settle issues at hand requires an operational calculus. Axiomatically, every sovereign state has a capability to design and execute the detailed calculus of diplomacy required to settle disputes. Strategy alone is insufficient to settle disputes, and possession of such capability enables but does not assure success in policy, whereas its absence assures failure.
5. When marshalled into a collective enterprise such as a quad, Member States must not only deconflict individual and then adopt common substantive policy aims, but also exercise discipline in harmonizing processes in making decisions, allocating resources, sharing costs and information, and in communications. Larger populated fora require greater coordination and cooperation. This poses the question, 'is there greater or lesser strength and effect in greater numbers of Member States?' The observation of some research suggests there is greater strength in lesser numbers at a given time in diplomacy, depending on which Member States are involved.

3. The Quad 1.0 (2007)

3.1 The standup of the Quad 1.0

On 25 May 2007, on the sidelines of the ASEAN regional Summit Forum in the Philippines, the Head of Government of Japan initiated discussions among the four states that had comprised the TCG. The forum intended to advance values and systems of democratic governance throughout the region and derived from the premise democracies seldom enter armed conflict with other democracies, not that autocracies necessarily do so more often. The forum was cited as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, the Quad. Its first meeting was not made public to avoid provoking the People's Republic of China, an autocracy. However, China sent a *démarche*, a formal diplomatic note, to each of the four states asking why they were initiating the Quad.

India replied that the Quad had no security implication. Australia, replied that the quad's agenda was limited to issues in trade and culture, being mindful of its strong trade relations with China and notwithstanding its March 2007 security agreement with Tokyo* and the extension of bilateral U.S. security dialogues with Australia and Japan into a formal Trilateral Security Dialogue since March

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2006*. The US continued to project and maintain a transparent security-focused balance of power in the region notwithstanding its trade relations with China.⁹

Notwithstanding real or perceived ambiguity in these varied responses, the Quad 1.0 initiative preceded security-centric diplomacy in the form of a two-part version of the annual *Malabar* naval exercise. *Malabar 07-01* exercised navies of the four Member States plus that of Singapore in the Bay of Bengal east of India. *Malabar 07-02* exercised, for the first time, the navies of the US and Japan in the locale of Okinawa.



Fig 1; combined breadth of *Malabar 07-01* and *Malabar 07-02*, from Bay of Bengal to East china sea

Diplomatic effect was twofold.

1. Both exercises bracketed the margins of the South China Sea and East China Sea. Arguably, this signaled the capability and willingness of the Quad's member States to robustly deploy sea-power across the western Pacific / Indo-Pacific.
2. The second exercise occurred close to Okinawa, 395 nautical miles northeast of Taiwan. Notably, the southern-most islands of the Okinawa archipelago are contentiously claimed by China as the Diaoyu Islands, by Japan as the Senkaku Islands and by Taiwan as the Diaoyutai

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Islands. They are known otherwise as the Pinnacle Islands. These claims are further complicated by China's claim that the western margin of the Okinawa Trough demarcates the eastern limit of its continental shelf, a claim contended by Japan. Arguably, the Quad's conducting joint naval exercises in these waters signaled political willingness of all Quad Member States to deploy threat or use of force resistance to China's force-based measures to assert its claims, should it occur.



Fig 2; Okinawa Trough, Okinawa- Taiwan, disputed islands, contentious maritime boundaries¹⁰

3.2 Obstacles

In addition to each of the four Member States' disparate responses to China's démarche noted above, the Member States encountered at least two longstanding obstacles, the first institutional and the second real.

3.2.1 Asian ambivalence to multilateralism and international law

As a systemic or institutional obstacle, multilateral regional diplomacy in defence and security is not as frequent a phenomenon among Asian states as elsewhere, as many states are wary of its effectiveness. Observers note that a real or apparent ambivalence to international law and institutions

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throughout Asia may derive from e.g., **(i)** histories that narrate the unconscionable terms of treaties imposed by European victors concluding the Opium Wars; **(ii)** extant hostility towards former western colonial regimes; **(iii)** unwarranted preponderance of western influence in the progressive development of international law and shaping the international political order.

Balancing an Asian broadly-based ambivalence toward multilateralism in general with one facet of multilateralism is an exception-based yet defensible paradox. “If Asian states share common ground, it is the international-law-wary Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence that include ‘mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty’ and ‘mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs’ ... These principles might offer the grounding for ‘a substantive impact of the rise of Asian powers’ ... ‘embody[ing] a very traditional notion of sovereignty’.”¹¹ Survival of the state is a primal sovereign need satisfied by the first general principle of international law, the right to exercise power.¹²

3.2.2 Extant territorial disputes

One individual dispute may thwart progress in the settlement of regional security disputes generally. Illustratively, one such dispute arises from contentious interpretation of the Simla Convention (1914), which set out the 3,440 km McMahon Line demarcating the boundary between the United Kingdom and Tibet and through the territory of Kashmir and Ladakh, now called the Line of Actual Control. The gravity of the dispute may not concern ultimate control over desolate territory per se. However, it may more concern the potential for the dispute settlement process itself to escalate from diplomacy into a threat or use of force between two of the world’s nuclear powers, each of whom is among the largest, best trained, professionally led, and well-equipped military establishments, regardless of any breach of international legal obligations or commission of internationally wrongful acts. The Sino-Indian War (1962) demonstrated such potential.

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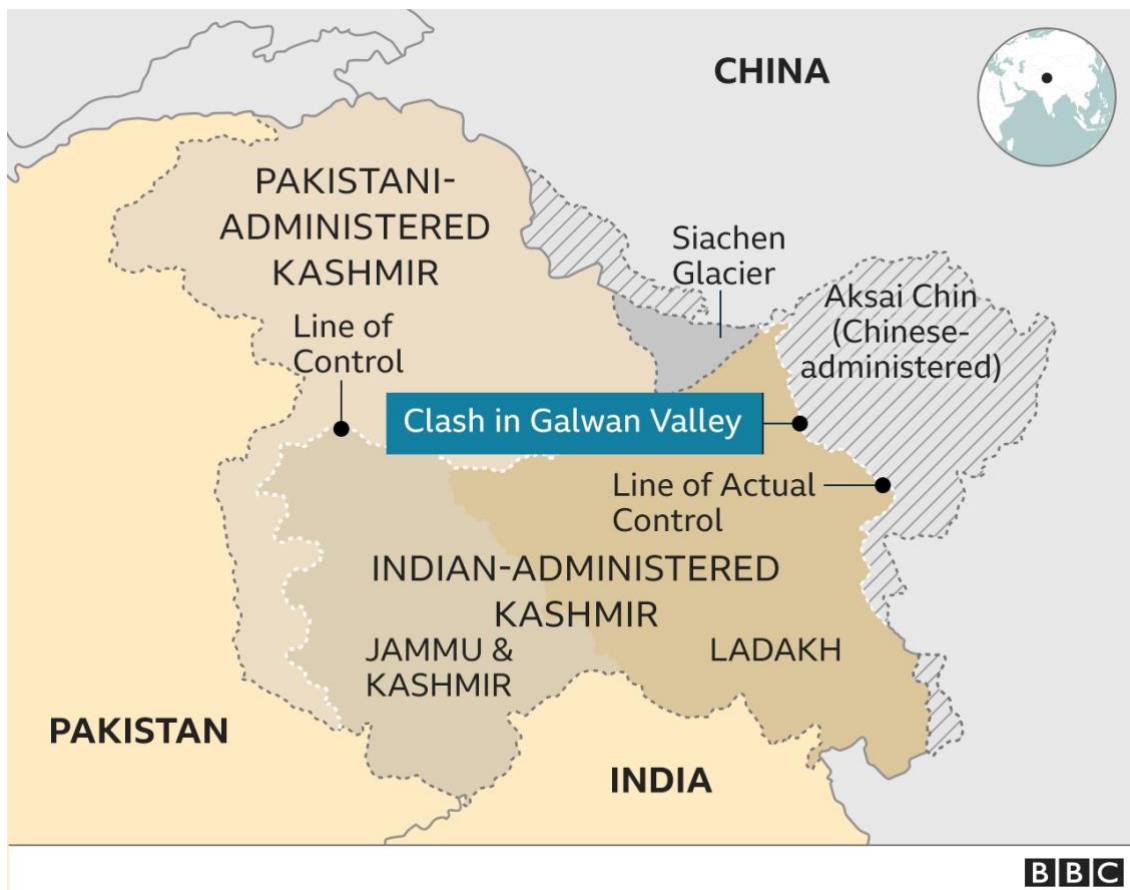


Fig. 3; the India / PRC Border and Line of Actual Control ¹³

3.3 The standdown of Quad 1.0

Quad 1.0 concluded in January 2008 with no further immediate outputs. Reasons for the conclusion might have included

1. states' lack of complete planning, or planning only to a conceptual or strategic level as to its achievable purpose;
2. higher policy priorities, beliefs that Quad 1.0 as an entity could not deliver its intended outputs, deference to the PRC's protests.

As such, the legacy effect of Quad I was marginal.

4. Summary

Part II of this note [forthcoming] will assess the more recently [2017] updated model of the Quad, namely, Quad 2.0 including select trends and events in regional geopolitics. Further, it will identify procedural and substantive conditions for success in other quad-like arrangements that might be applied in other maritime security contexts. Part III of this note [forthcoming] will assess whether and how these conditionalities can influence outputs and outcomes of dispute settlement in another context, namely, the Arctic region.

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