

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE QUAD:
AN AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVE**

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Executive Summary

1. Quad 1.0 was constructed in 2007 to bring together countries that share a democratic political system as well as support human rights and the rule of law. Then Australian Prime Minister John Howard saw the Quad as a means to ensure continuing commitment by the United States in the Indo-Pacific region.
2. Howard also saw it as an opportunity to further strengthen security links with Japan and India. Security ties with Japan were already established and flourishing, but engagement with the Indian security community and networking among Australian and Indian elites were limited.
3. The economic incentives for maintaining close relations with China were overwhelming for Australia as China is Australia's largest trading partner.
4. Quad 1.0 collapsed shortly after Japanese Prime Minister Abe resigned in late 2007 and other leaders including newly elected Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd showed little interest.
5. Quad 2.0 constructed in 2017, by contrast, suits Australia's current position of bandwagoning with like-minded countries attempting to constrain China while engaging in regional diplomacy as part of norm setting in regional architecture to influence China's range of policy options on specific issues.
6. Quad 2.0 was formed chiefly in response to the rise of China as a direct competitor to the United States. All four Quad countries have increased cooperation to balance China and to some extent restrain Chinese activities and influence in the Indo Pacific.
7. For Australia the challenges of an assertive China and the souring of bilateral relations with Beijing since 2015 were particularly salient. As a result, successive Turnbull and Morrison governments turned to the United States and Quad 2.0 to balance China. Concerns about China led to the 2018 decision to ban Huawei from the 5G network in Australia citing concerns about national security.

8. Unlike other Quad members, the main concern for Australia is not security but economics such as trade embargoes and the redirecting of students and tourists which will have a devastating and far-reaching impact on the Australian economy.
9. Enhanced bilateral relations with India in the security field and a potential free trade agreement offer the possibility of offsetting trade with China.
10. The Australia, United Kingdom and United States (AUKUS) security pact on 16 September 2021 showcased a stronger US naval and military presence in Australia to complement the Quad and other trilateral security dialogues in order to counter Chinese power and influence.
11. A more effective policy for Australia is to use the Quad Plus to promote an environment whereby the United States and China can reach a mutual power sharing arrangement and cooperate on pressing regional issues such as the pandemic, climate change and natural disasters.

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Balancing against China

- 1.1 The emergence of China as a regional hegemon with rapidly developing military and naval capabilities has taken place as bilateral relations between Australia and China have soured. In this context, the quadrilateral security dialogue (the Quad) between Australia, the United States, Japan and India have been viewed in Canberra as an important development. In particular, the Quad is regarded as an opportunity to ensure continuing commitment by the United States in the region to balance China, thereby maintaining an international and regional order that has served Australian national interests for the past 70 years.
- 1.2 The Quad, moreover, solidifies already close relations with Japan and offers the possibility for deeper strategic and economic engagement between Australia and India that, over time, may offset the overreliance on trade with China. The current focus of the Quad is on non-traditional security, such as pandemics, climate change, technology and humanitarian assistance, which complements Australia's regional diplomatic efforts and will garner support and cooperation in the region. With time there is even the potential to include China as a regional member of Quad Plus and thereby reduce great power tensions. The announcement of a new trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States (AUKUS) in September 2021 however, demonstrated that upgrading trilateral security alliances and using the Quad to balance China is the priority in Canberra.

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The Quad: An Overview

- 2.1 The concept of the Quad emerged from cooperation between the United States, Japan, India and Australia to assist countries affected by the 2004 tsunami natural disaster. A strong advocate of the Quad, former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe argued that like-minded democracies working together was a powerful force in the international system. Abe's speech in New Delhi on 22 August 2007 titled 'Confluence of the Two Seas' promoted the idea of Japan, India, the United States and Australia working together as a broader Asian network for growth and prosperity. In effect, Abe set the tone for the intellectual foundation of the Quad.¹ His conception of the four countries stretching over the Indian and Pacific Oceans cooperating as like-minded nations captured the imagination of Indian interlocutors.
- 2.2 The then US Vice President Dick Cheney was also quick to see the benefits of the Quad and strongly supported the concept. Cheney, no doubt, also saw the grouping as a bloc designed to thwart the growing influence of a rising China. The idea of the Quad was also promoted by think tanks in the United States which were advocating minilateralism (an informal small grouping of countries with specific goals) as a mechanism for closer cooperation among democracies in the Asia Pacific. Australia was the last country to embrace the concept due to the preference of the Howard government for bilateral deals.
- 2.3 The first formal meeting took place on the sidelines of the August 2007 ASEAN Regional Forum held in Manila where each country was represented by a senior departmental official in a low-key meeting. Momentum continued with the US-India Malabar naval exercise expanding to include Japan and Australia (plus Singapore) in the Bay of Bengal the following month. In 2008 interest in the Quad waned due to leadership changes in Japan (Abe resigned) and Australia (Howard lost an election) as well as reduced interest of their successors (Yasuo Fukuda and Kevin Rudd). There was also sustained criticism from security specialists and commentators about ambiguity surrounding the agenda and main functions of the Quad. China, moreover, applied diplomatic pressure on each country to withdraw

¹ Shinzo Abe, 'Confluence of the Two Seas', <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>, accessed 6 August 2021.

or fundamentally change the intentions of the Quad.² In this environment the Quad effectively collapsed.

- 2.4 Nonetheless, three trilateral security arrangements, namely (i) the United States, Japan and Australia, (ii) India, Japan and Australia, and (iii) the United States, India and Japan, were implemented and have continued to operate over the past 10 years. These trilaterals offered a framework for a revitalised Quad which then US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono jointly proposed in 2017. Unlike the environment in 2007, all four countries are now motivated by the emergence of a powerful and increasingly assertive China to pursue a quadrilateral arrangement to balance China in the Asia-Pacific region. A meeting (at the assistant secretary level) was held in November 2017 on the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum in Manila. Since 2019, several meetings have been held at the ministerial level and in March 2021, the first leaders virtual meeting was chaired by US President Joe Biden. A key byproduct of that historic meeting was the broader framework to develop a network of supporting countries through ‘Quad Plus’ and a regional COVID vaccination assistance plan designed to deal with the pandemic and highlight the non-traditional security component of the new alignment. Questions about the motive of establishing Quad 2.0 and its objectives, plus Chinese criticism that the Quad is an Asian NATO targeting China remain an issue.

Australia and the Quad

- 3.1 The Quad was a product of a series of multilateral security arrangements signed off in Canberra since 1945. The first was the Australia, New Zealand and the United States security treaty (ANZUS) signed in 1951. That was followed in 1954 by the now defunct Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO) which was to be the Asian version of NATO (and included France and Pakistan) and the ongoing Five Power Defence Agreement (FPDA) signed in 1971 between Britain, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand. Notably the FPDA, though non-binding and consultative in nature, offers opportunities for the five nations to discuss security

² ‘China warns Canberra on security pact’, <https://www.theage.com.au/national/china-warns-canberra-on-security-pact-20070615-ge54v5.html>, accessed 29 August 2021.

issues and is a platform for a rapid response among partners should a security crisis eventuate.³

3.2 An early example of a quadrilateral proposal came from then Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser during a visit to Beijing in 1976. Without consulting Washington, Fraser discussed with Chinese Premier Hua Goufeng on the possibility of an Australia, United States, China and Japan defence agreement to balance Soviet expansion in the Asia Pacific.⁴ Although the proposal fizzled out due to a lack of interest by potential participants, Fraser was well received in Beijing and the shared concern between Fraser and Chinese leaders about Soviet expansionism served to enhance personal connections and bilateral ties between Australia and China. Fraser's proposal that included China is a timely reminder that the framework and membership of a multilateral or minilateral security arrangement is fluid and shaped by the prevailing trends in the international environment.

3.3 When the Quad was first discussed in 2007 the Australian government was supportive, though tentative. Prime Minister John Howard was focused on bilateral ties with key strategic countries and viewed multilateralism with suspicion even though he was willing to use this form of diplomacy to achieve a particular goal. He clearly felt comfortable working with like-minded democratic countries and encouraged strategies that secured US commitment to the Asia-Pacific region. Australian intelligence and security community members had, of course, been closely working with counterparts from the United States under the auspices of the ANZUS alliance since 1951. The alliance and the close cultural and political connection to the United States has been the bedrock of Australian foreign and defence policy and has defined Australia's position in the Asia-Pacific region. Consequently, Howard desired a close relationship with the United States and supported the United States in the region wherever possible as a loyal ally. The famous 'Deputy Sheriff' tag that came from an interview Howard had with *The*

³ 'The Five Power Defence Arrangements: Time for the quiet achiever to emerge', <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-five-power-defence-arrangements-time-for-the-quiet-achiever-to-emerge/>, accessed 7 September 2021.

⁴ 'Fraser and China', https://www.australiachinarelations.org/sites/default/files/19605%20ACRI%20Prime%20Ministers%20Series%20-%20Fraser%20and%20China_v10.pdf, accessed 7 September 2021.

Bulletin in September 1999 stuck to Howard for the remainder of his tenure as prime minister.⁵

3.4 In this context support for US-led initiatives and networking with like-minded democracies through the Quad concept were readily endorsed in Canberra. A formal regional security pact down the track was not a priority but was a tantalising prospect for the Howard government. The Quad also represented an opportunity to strengthen bilateral security ties with Japan and India. As Australia's largest trading partner for the previous four decades, Japan was already deemed one of Australia's key bilateral partners. Closer consultation between the security communities in Canberra and Tokyo already began in the 1990s and complemented the very strong economic and commercial ties. The rapid escalation in security ties, which started as a response to the '9/11' terrorist attacks in the United States, led to prime ministers Junichiro Koizumi and John Howard seeking new ways to develop security ties both bilaterally and multilaterally among US allies in the region. The shared values on democracy, human rights and rule of law, and a shared dependency on the United States for security have been crucial factors in the escalation of closer ties. The culmination of new security ties was the 2007 Australia and Japan Joint Declaration on Security Co-operation. Australia became the second country (after the United States) to sign a security agreement with Japan in the post-war period. Annual consultation at the ministerial level (2 plus 2 talks among defence and foreign affairs ministers) and regular upgrades to the security relationship have been a feature of the relationship over the past 15 years and supported by successive prime ministers in both countries.⁶

3.5 Opportunities to develop stronger ties with India were more challenging. By 2007 Australia had spent considerable resources over a decade to improve economic and political ties, and foster more avenues for trade and networking among Australian and Indian elites with limited success. Despite a shared British heritage and membership of the British Commonwealth, the bilateral relationship had been

⁵ 'Howard should end confusion on foreign policy', <https://www.theage.com.au/opinion/howard-should-end-confusion-on-foreign-policy-20030603-gdvt92.html>, accessed 1 September 2021.

⁶ David Walton, 'Australia and Japan: Towards a New Security Partnership?', *Japanese Studies*, 28:1, 73-86, 2008, DOI: 10.1080/10371390801942033.

strained by cold war politics (India's connections with the Soviet Union) and a personality clash between long serving prime ministers, Robert Menzies and Jawaharlal Nehru in the 1960s. As a result, there was a disconnect between the two countries that continued until the late 1980s. The Rudd Labour government's decision in 2008 to impose a uranium ban on India placed a considerable strain on bilateral relations. The subsequent lifting of the uranium ban despite India remaining a non-member of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty in 2013 and the visit to Australia by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014 have assisted in improving bilateral ties.⁷

Australian Support for the Quad Waivers over China

- 4.1 In many respects, the key issue that maligned the original Quad in Australia was the lack of specificity about the Quad's purpose and objectives. Much has been written about debates within Australia on the efficacy of the Quad, whether it was constructed as an anti-China bloc and whether Prime Minister Kevin Rudd effectively 'killed' the Quad. At the time of its conception in 2007, the Quad demonstrated an affinity based on shared values between the four countries rather than shared animosity towards China.
- 4.2 An immediate problem for the Australian government was how to sell the Quad without straining relations with China. Howard's foreign policy was unambiguously tied to the US alliance, developing closer security ties with Japan and improving overall bilateral ties with China which was then emerging as a global economic power. Howard, after some early diplomatic bumbles, was developing a coherent China policy that included supporting China's rise and entry as a world economic power on the proviso that China operated within the existing international system. Indeed, he argued that China trade was good for China and the world.⁸ There was considerable concern in Australian business circles that Chinese leaders would view the Quad as a containment policy and that this would affect the extraordinary

⁷ 'Australia-India relations poised to take off', <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/australia-india-relations-poised-to-take-off>, accessed 26 September 2021.

⁸ 'China's military fears put to rest', <https://www.theage.com.au/national/chinas-military-fears-put-to-rest-20070710-ge5bbv.html>, accessed 3 September 2021.

volume in two-way trade. Considerable lobbying by the powerful business lobby was ramped up to ensure that trade did not dissipate because of mismanagement of the China relationship. In 2007 two-way trade was growing at a rapid rate due to China's seemingly inexhaustible appetite for Australian raw resources. In the following year, China surpassed Japan as Australia's leading trading partner. Understandably, the Australian business community had high expectations that the phenomenally high rates of economic growth in China would lead to decades of unparalleled two-way trade in Australia's favour.

- 4.3 In this environment, the Howard coalition government saw no reason to alienate China and took decisive and effective action. In response to Chinese concerns about the Quad as an anti-China bloc, defence minister, Brendon Nelson, was sent to Beijing on 9 July 2007. While in Beijing, Nelson "reassured China that Australia had no intention of expanding the Australian-US-Japan military relationship to include India... and that the so-called quadrilateral strategic dialogue with India was not something we are pursuing".⁹ Indeed Nelson went further by encouraging greater military links between Australia and China to deepen their bilateral relationship.¹⁰ His meeting was the basis for what became a comprehensive bilateral plan that included annual 2 plus 2 talks between foreign affairs and defence ministers.

Did Rudd 'kill' the Quad?

- 5.1 The debate in Australia about who is responsible for 'killing' the original Quad is illustrative of how the narrative about the Quad and Australia's relationship with China has changed over the past 10 years. Despite then Defence Minister Brendan Nelson's July 2007 statement in Beijing, the general belief in Australian circles is that Rudd effectively ended the Quad. The very public announcement on 5 February 2008 in Canberra that Australia would not be seeking further engagement in Quad activities by then Labour Minister for Foreign Affairs Stephen Smith at a joint press

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

conference with his Chinese counterpart Yang Jiechi had cemented this belief.¹¹ Discussion on responsibility for ending the Quad was reignited by Prime Minister Scott Morrison's comments at a Lowy lecture in October 2019 that Rudd was responsible for effectively breaking up the Quad in 2008. Morrison discussed how he was "having to work patiently to restore trust and confidence following the Rudd government's policy to disconnect from the Quad".¹² Unlike the environment in 2007/2008, negative comments towards China and support for the Quad 2.0 are currently politically popular in Australia. Morrison's statement shrewdly cast the Liberal party as pro-Quad and tough on China thereby raising doubt about a future Labour government's approach to both China and Quad activities despite bipartisan support for both policies. The argument was that the then newly elected Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was focused on engagement with China and ending uranium sales to India, thereby seeking to 'kill' the Quad.

- 5.2 Notably, Morrison's account has been refuted by Rudd. He argued that it was the Howard government who effectively ended Australia's role in the Quad drawing on the example of Nelson's July 2007 comments in Beijing and Howard indicating to US officials a desire to focus on bilateral (rather than minilateral) arrangements in June the same year.¹³ Rudd's claim that Howard was directly responsible has merit. Indeed, it could be argued that there was bipartisanship in Australia on this matter and that all four countries were losing interest, thereby leading to the Quad's collapse. Daniel Flinton, for example, has commented that once Abe resigned as prime minister in Japan the interest in the Quad began to wane. He noted that Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was only lukewarm to the concept and that American interest was also subsiding due to a desire to maintain Chinese involvement in the Six Party talks on North Korea.¹⁴

¹¹ 'China – Australia hold strategic meeting', <https://www.smh.com.au/national/china-australia-hold-strategic-meeting-20080205-1q43.html>, accessed 8 September 2021.

¹² Daniel Flinton, 'Who really killed the Quad 1.0?', <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/who-really-killed-quad-10>, accessed 6 June 2021.

¹³ Kevin Rudd, 'The history behind who killed the Quad', <https://www.afr.com/policy/foreign-affairs/the-history-behind-who-killed-the-quad-20210328-p57epm>, accessed 30 August 2021.

¹⁴ Daniel Flinton, 'Who really killed the Quad 1.0?', <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/who-really-killed-quad-10>, accessed 6 June 2021.

Quad 2.0: Balancing China

- 6.1 When Quad 2.0 reunited the four countries in 2017, the three previously mentioned sets of trilateral security arrangements had been active over the past decade. It meant that the four states had consolidated their military responses to China's increased military capabilities by linking their bilateral relationships with the trilateral security arrangements.
- 6.2 From an Australian perspective, an important development that complemented security ties with the United States and Japan and trilateral cooperation has been the increase in bilateral defence and intelligence cooperation with India based on concerns about Chinese assertiveness. A security agreement had been signed in 2009 and this was followed by trilateral security dialogue with Japan and India commencing in 2015.
- 6.3 In 2020 Australia was again invited to join the Malabar naval exercises (along with the United States) and in June that year it signed a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with India which included defence and foreign minister 2 plus 2 talks, increased military interoperability and a joint declaration on shared vision for maritime cooperation in the Indo Pacific.¹⁵
- 6.4 At the inaugural ministerial talks held in New Delhi on 12 September 2021, security ties were reaffirmed and India was invited to join the Talisman Sabre military exercises to be held with the United States in Australia in 2023. Closer security ties and the resumption of long stalled free trade negotiations are evidence that bilateral relations are now developing at a rapid rate.¹⁶
- 6.5 The enhanced military and security activities in bilateral and trilateral security arrangements were a response to the rise of China as a direct competitor to the United States. Now a regional hegemon with global reach, as demonstrated by the

¹⁵ 'Joint statement: Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Republic of India and Australia', <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/india/Pages/joint-statement-comprehensive-strategic-partnership-between-republic-india-and-australia>, accessed 11 September 2021 .

¹⁶ 'Australia and India vow to strengthen military ties', <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-09-12/australia-and-india-vow-to-strengthen-military-ties/100454992>, accessed 13 September 2021.

staggering Belt and Road initiative, Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank and massive Chinese investment worldwide, China has transformed the global economy and established itself as a rival to the United States. Interlinked has been the relative decline of the United States as China's economy is set to surpass that of the United States as the number one economy and Chinese military capabilities will be close to parity within a decade. Moreover, Chinese assertiveness in the South and East China Seas and border clashes between Indian and Chinese soldiers have galvanised support among the four Quad countries to increase cooperation to balance China and to some extent restrain Chinese activities and influence in the Asia-Pacific region.

6.6 For Australia, Quad 2.0 represents a new phase in relations with China. Since the heady days of 2008, bilateral relations with China, particularly in the past six years, have deteriorated. Much to the concern of those wanting to reset relations, successive Australian governments have viewed China as a destabilising influence in the Asia Pacific. Canberra's concern has centred on Chinese actions in claiming islands and establishing military bases in the South China Sea as well as offering Chinese aid and development packages to Pacific Island nations traditionally viewed as within the Australian sphere of influence. Combined with a sudden massive increase in Chinese investment in Australia and public concern about Chinese political interference in Australian domestic affairs, a once very strong and dynamic bilateral relationship has become increasingly brittle.

6.7 In response to Chinese assertiveness, the Turnbull and Morrison governments have turned to the United States to balance China, further cementing the importance of the alliance in the Australian security and intelligence communities and in the mindset of the mainstream media and public. The strongest signal of Australia's volte face on China was the decision in 2018 by the Turnbull government to block Huawei from the 5G network in Australia citing concerns about national security. Demand by Morrison and senior ministers for an enquiry into the cause of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 led to a further increase in bilateral tensions. China has responded by listing 14 demands, imposing trade embargoes and tit for

tat verbal exchanges over human rights which have worsened relations and set back possibilities of reconciliation for the foreseeable future.¹⁷

6.8 Although Australia, unlike other Quad 2.0 members, has no immediate security threats from China, there has been considerable pressure through trade embargoes. The threat (and most likely the reality) of Chinese leaders redirecting China's prospective students and tourists to other countries post pandemic will also have a far-reaching economic impact on the Australian economy. In this environment, Canberra views the Quad 2.0 as part of responsible collective action to check China's influence. It is difficult to assume that China does not see the re-emergence of the Quad and Australia's role in it as part of an anti-China movement. It fits into the pattern of a bad faith model evident in current bilateral relations and Australia's position that China is being belligerent and a source of destabilisation in regional affairs. Nonetheless, it has been Australian policies, such as blocking Huawei and demanding an enquiry into the origins of COVID-19 in response to aggressive Chinese behaviour, rather than the re-emergence of the Quad that have led to a rapid decline in overall bilateral relations.

6.9 Unlike the original Quad, which was perceived as anti-China but folded essentially due to a desire by all four countries to maintain good relations with Beijing, the agenda of Quad 2.0 is to constrain Chinese choices and not to contain China due to its sheer size and power capabilities. As noted by Euan Graham, the option for cold war-like containment of China is no longer possible. The joint military exercises conducted through the Quad have been replaced by a looser, more contingent diplomatic hedging mechanism which allows for flexibility to ratchet up or dial down approaches, subject to China's response.¹⁸ It is an approach that suits Australia's current policy of bandwagoning with like-minded countries to constrain China while also engaging in regional diplomacy as part of norm setting in regional architecture in an attempt to influence China's range of policy options on specific issues.

¹⁷ See David Walton, 'Australia and China: Souring Relations with Little Chance of a Reset on the Horizon', *East Asian Policy*, Volume 13, No. 2, April/June 2021.

¹⁸ Euan Graham, 'Debating the Quad', http://bellschool.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/uploads/2018-03/cog_39_web_-_debating_the_quad.pdf, accessed 1 September 2021.

Australia's Position on Quad 2.0

- 7.1 The official position in Canberra on the Quad (and endorsed by the opposition Labour party) has evolved over the past 10 years. The main objective is stated as a desire to maintain an open, inclusive and resilient Indo Pacific with ASEAN at its centre.¹⁹ Notably Quad 2.0 is not discussed in terms of a potential security pact, nor were there military exercises conducted directly through the Quad. There is also no direct reference to China, though some oblique statements point in that direction. Instead, the agenda, while wide ranging, reflects Australia's focus on Southeast Asia as a priority area in its regional diplomacy. Emphasis is placed on engagement within ASEAN-led architecture as well as bilateral, multilateral and regional cooperation. Key principles of the Quad are described as supporting Indo-Pacific partners' responses to COVID-19 vaccines and economic recovery, critical technology, dealing with climate change issues, maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.²⁰
- 7.2 Of note was the decision by Quad members in March 2021 for an immediate initiative to provide an extra one billion doses of COVID vaccine to needy nations in Southeast Asia and the Pacific.²¹ All four countries played a part; the vaccine was developed in the United States, financed jointly by Japan and the United States, to be manufactured in India for delivery to Southeast Asian and Pacific countries by Australia. As noted by Ashok Sharma, the Quad's vaccine initiative, while focused on humanitarian concerns, is also designed to check China's vaccine diplomacy in countries of strategic significance in the Indo Pacific.²² The fact that the Australian government has committed AUS\$100 million to the Quad vaccine scheme is

¹⁹ DFAT, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/regional-architecture/quad>, accessed 19 June 2021 .

²⁰ DFAT, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/regional-architecture/quad>, accessed 19 June 2021.

²¹ 'Four sided friendship is history in the making', <https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/four-sided-friendship-is-history-in-the-making-20210315-p57asb.html>, accessed 1 September 2021.

²² Ashok Sharma, 'The first summit Quad meeting reaffirms a free and open and secure Indo Pacific', <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/the-first-summit-quad-meeting-reaffirms-a-free-open-and-secure-indo-pacific/>, accessed 4 September 2021.

commendable.²³ Even more impressive is the fact that this is on top of the AUS\$500 million committed to vaccine access and health security in the Pacific Islands and Timor Leste, plus vaccine delivery in Southeast Asia over a three-year period (2020-2022).²⁴ Combined, the two commitments demonstrate the importance of the region in overall Australian policy calculations.

- 7.3 The revised position and Quad working parties focusing on the pandemic, climate change and critical technologies establish a positive and constructive tone which sits comfortably with Australia's desire to be a responsible regional actor. By focusing on non-traditional security, Australia is not antagonising or inflaming security tensions with China. Vaccine diplomacy is a clear priority in the current COVID-19 pandemic and although there is competition with China over supplying vaccines, it nonetheless positions the Quad countries in a positive light. For Canberra, with abundant supplies of Astra Zeneca vaccine, it is an opportunity to promote goodwill. Climate change, moreover, is a good example of an area in which China is a cooperative player and not a competitor. As noted by Kutty and Basrur, the strategy to focus on core regional issues downplays the notion that the Quad is simply an instrument of containment.²⁵ Combined, the three initiatives are designed to construct an environment that encourages China to be a positive player and persuade other states to shed their hesitancy towards the Quad.

Quad Plus: The New Agenda

- 8.1 The 'Quad Plus' framework was raised as a new, loose governance structure at the inaugural leaders' summit in March 2021. It fits Australian objectives of working closely with ASEAN over the past two decades and recognising the importance of existing structures and mechanisms. To this end, Australia has been a dialogue partner of ASEAN (since 1974) and has been actively engaging with ASEAN

²³ 'Quad initiative', <https://indopacifichealthsecurity.dfat.gov.au/quad-initiative>, accessed 9 September 2021.

²⁴ 'Australian support:ovid-19 vaccine access Pacific and South East Asia', <https://indopacifichealthsecurity.dfat.gov.au/australian-support-covid-19-vaccine-access-pacific-and-southeast-asia>, accessed 11 September 2021.

²⁵ 'The Quad: What it is and what it is not', <https://thediplomat.com/2021/03/the-quad-what-it-is-and-what-it-is-not/>, accessed 10 September 2021 .

through annual ASEAN-Australia forums since 2016 and at ASEAN and East Asian summits.

8.2 At its core, ‘Quad Plus’ is an attempt to engage with as many countries in the Asia Pacific as possible in a loosely connected, flexible arrangement. It is not designed as a replacement of existing architecture or a new overarching governance structure. A strength of the Quad Plus concept is that it is non-binding. It allows the agenda item and membership of the grouping to be fluid depending on the issue. As a network, rather than a governance body with clear rules and membership, the Quad Plus concept has the potential of attracting the interest of a wide range of countries in the region if the core principles are maintained and the body does not become an overt anti-China security bloc. As such the concept should not be viewed as a threat to ASEAN. Indeed, there is symmetry with ASEAN initiatives of inclusiveness and respect for individual countries.

8.3 Currently the concept is at an exploratory stage and Quad members are meeting and discussing with Vietnam, South Korea and New Zealand on the pandemic and sharing technologies and ideas for getting the global economy back on track without any formal commitment.²⁶ Notably, both South Korea and New Zealand have been cautious about using language that could be interpreted as targeting or containing China. The Free and Open Indo-Pacific, however, is a broad concept as trade is vital for both countries and a conflict in the South China Sea would be detrimental to all nations in the region. Countries which are seen to be candidates for Quad Plus activities include the United Kingdom, Singapore and Canada. Potentially, other ASEAN countries may join though Southeast Asian countries are hedging and will only consider membership of the Quad Plus if it is deemed to be sufficiently broad in its scope and not override ASEAN centrality. As noted by Hugh White, Southeast Asian countries have yet to be convinced of the efficacy of Quad 2.0 and maintained a balanced approach between Chinese and US interests.²⁷ Notably, on 9 February 2021, South Korea clarified that it is willing to support the Quad so long as it is

²⁶ <https://perthusasia.edu.au/getattachment/Our-Work/Towards-a-Quad-Plus-Arrangement/PU-160-Quad-0421b-WEB.pdf.aspx?lang=en-AU>, accessed 7 September 2021.

²⁷ Hugh White, ‘US - China contest: Questions about the Quad’, *The Straits Times*, 28 August 2021. <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/us-china-contest-questions-about-the-quad>, accessed 22 September 2021.

transparent, open and inclusive and in line with international norms.²⁸ The decision in Seoul to support the Quad, if there is no antagonistic intent towards China, is indicative of the general sentiment within the region.

The Future of the Quad

- 9.1 The future of the Quad is subject to several factors. An important issue is the direction of US foreign and security policy since the shambolic withdrawal from Afghanistan in late August 2021. A critical question under scrutiny by observers of US foreign policy is how the withdrawal from Kabul will affect American appetite for a long-term commitment in the Indo Pacific. President Biden has placed a positive spin on events arguing that US withdrawal from Afghanistan will allow Washington to deal more effectively with strategic competition from China and problems with Russia on multiple fronts.²⁹
- 9.2 At face value, Biden's rhetoric suggests a less weary United States which is able to harness more resources for the Quad and commit long term to the Indo Pacific. From Canberra's perspective, this is a best-case scenario. A re-energised United States would support the position that minilateralism through the Quad is the most effective method in combating Chinese hegemonic influence.
- 9.3 As noted by Rudd, Quad 2.0 has the capacity to be a formidable force with increased numbers through the loose Quad Plus arrangement from Asia and the EU (and possibility NATO). Indeed, Rudd argues that "the ability of Chinese officials to settle on a strategy to undermine the Quad's progress will be one of the key factors determining the course of US-Chinese competition – and the fate of China's global ambitions more generally".³⁰

²⁸ Hahnkyu Park and Chan Hee Yang, 'South Korea's Strategic Options amid the US-China Strategic Competition Under the Biden Administration', *East Asian Policy*, Vol. 13, No. 2, April/June 2021, p. 59.

²⁹ 'Biden calls evacuation from Afghanistan an extraordinary success', <https://www.smh.com.au/world/north-america/biden-calls-evacuation-from-afghanistan-an-extraordinary-success-20210901-p58nok.html>, accessed 11 September 2021.

³⁰ Kevin Rudd, 'Why the Quad alarms China?', https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-08-06/why-quad-alarms-china?utm_medium=newsletters&utm_source=twofa&utm_campaign=Why%20the%20Quad%20, accessed 13 August 2021.

- 9.4 The surprise joint announcement of a new trilateral security pact between Australia, the UK and the United States (AUKUS) on 16 September 2021 showcased the new focus on the Indo Pacific. Morrison commented that the new trilateral pact is a ‘forever friendship’ that has solidified Australia’s position in countering China’s influence in regional affairs.³¹
- 9.5 The first initiative of the new trilateral security pact was a submarine deal for Australia involving nuclear technology from the United States and UK. It meant that Canberra had scrapped the submarine deal with France in favour of a nuclear-powered submarine which allows Australia to join the United States, the UK, France, Russia, China and India in an exclusive club with implications for naval capability and influence in the waters surrounding Australia’s coastline.
- 9.6 As noted by Peter Jennings, “America is going to be looking to Australia to play a leading role in this part of the world, stabilising the Pacific Islands region and South-East Asia”.³² Information on the new trilateral pact is currently still scarce. It is expected that AUKUS will see a stronger US military and naval presence in Australia. Together with nuclear powered submarines, AUKUS is expected to mean deeper military interoperability, new types of engagement between security communities and closer cooperation on cyber, applied AI and quantum technologies.³³
- 9.7 Notably the Albanese-led Labour opposition party has supported AUKUS and the submarine deal subject to Australia maintaining its non-nuclear proliferation policy, agreeing not to create a civilian nuclear industry in Australia and ruling out nuclear

³¹ ‘Australia in a forever deal , US and UK form ‘forever partnership’ with AUKUS trilateral technology sharing security deal’, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7432504/pm-all-in-on-forever-deal-with-us-uk-for-nuclear-run-subs/>, accessed 17 September 2021.

³² ‘Australia nuclear submarines US-UK AUKUS’, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-09-16/australia-nuclear-submarines-us-uk-aukus/100466078>, accessed 16 September 2021.

³³ ‘The AUKUS pact born in secrecy will have huge implications for Australia and the region’, https://theconversation.com/the-aukus-pact-born-in-secrecy-will-have-huge-implications-for-australia-and-the-region-168065?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=The%20Weekend%20Conversation%20-%202020631_20349&utm_content=The%20Weekend%20Conversation%20-%20202063120349+CID_b2e7a31840a481380034a65d5b8e50f2&utm_source=campaign_monitor&utm_term=The%20AUKUS%20pact%20born%20in%20secrecy%20will%20have%20huge%20implications%20for%20Australia%20and%20the%20region, accessed 18 September 2021.

weapons acquisition.³⁴ As these requirements have been agreed to by the Morrison government, a bipartisan position in support of AUKUS developed quickly. There has been some criticism by Labour about how the Morrison government has handled the submarine deal and Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs Penny Wong has discussed the need for Australia to retain its sovereignty. Overall, however, Labour has been careful to maintain a bipartisan approach to security.³⁵

9.8 The regional implications of this new development are immense and will require deft diplomatic skills by Australians to convince regional neighbours that the pact is not an abrogation of Australian commitment to regional integration and that Australia wishes to work towards a peaceful Indo Pacific. Interlinked is the concern by China and several other countries (including Indonesia) that the security pact is a potentially destabilising force and will lead to a regional arms race. Beijing has already condemned the creation of AUKUS as a “dangerous and reckless move that could undermine regional peace and that hurts non-proliferation efforts”.³⁶ Undoubtedly, leaders in Beijing will be watching AUKUS and Quad activities very closely to determine how best to respond to what is a provocative move by the three countries.

9.9 From Canberra’s perspective AUKUS will complement the Quad and other trilateral security dialogue designed to counter Chinese power and influence. To achieve this goal, all countries must be in alignment. The trajectory of trilateral security dialogue among Quad members and the fact that both Japanese and Indian prime ministers Yoshihide Suga and Narendra Modi have supported AUKUS on the eve of the Quad leaders’ meeting in Washington on 23 September 2021 bode well for the grouping.³⁷ At the first face to face Quad leaders’ meeting key issues discussed included

³⁴ ‘AUKUS Partnership’, <https://www.pennywong.com.au/media-hub/media-statements/aukus-partnership/>, accessed 19 September 2021.

³⁵ ‘Penny Wong to question AUKUS submarine deal’, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-09-23/penny-wong-to-question-aukus-submarine-deal-impact/100484384>, accessed 26 September 2021.

³⁶ ‘Australia’s nuclear sub deal ‘gravely undermines regional peace’ says China’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 September 2021, <https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/australia-s-nuclear-sub-deal-gravely-undermines-regional-peace-says-china-20210916-p58sbk.html>, accessed 25 September 2021.

³⁷ ‘Scott Morrison meets with Quad Leaders as Australia gets serious about tempering China’s strength’, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-09-25/scott-morrison-touts-free-and-open-indo-pacific-at-quad-meeting/100491080>, accessed 25 September 2021.

validation of the Quad and consolidation of plans put forward such as the one billion dose vaccination roll out scheme (now increased to 1.2 billion). The four leaders also agreed to an annual meeting and to focus on space, clean energy and vaccines as key agenda areas.³⁸ A take-away from the two-hour meeting was the positive nature of the group promoting peace and stability without formally referencing China or any specific threats. Instead, the desire for a free and open Indo Pacific was repeated as part of Quad rhetoric.

9.10 Despite these monumental developments, US withdrawal from Afghanistan and subsequent fallout has created some unease and uncertainty about US power and long-term interests among allies including Australia. In particular, the withdrawal raises the possibility of further ‘corrections’ in US policy down the track. As Sam Roggeveen has argued, the “Afghanistan withdrawal does show that the US will only go so far to protect interests that it no longer considers vital”.³⁹ The critical question therefore, and one that worries Australian officials, is when Washington will determine that the cost of strategic engagement with China is no longer a worthwhile proposition. Should the cost of leadership in Asia be deemed to be too high for the United States, a full or partial withdrawal from the Indo Pacific would ensue. Consequently, Australia would have to face a very different regional environment with new rules of engagement dominated by China. The viability of the Quad, moreover, would be under threat and like the original Quad, the likely result would be the collapse of Quad 2.0.

9.11 In either scenario there are serious problems for Australia. A strong and aggressive US presence in the region through AUKUS and the Quad draws Australia closer to confrontation with China. It is a policy dilemma that former Prime Minister Paul Keating considers to be needless and irresponsible.⁴⁰ A weakened United States that considers a partial or full withdrawal from the region, by contrast, results in

³⁸ ‘Quad leaders agree to meet annually in latest pushback against China’, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/09/25/asia-pacific/quad-washington-meeting/>, accessed 25 September 2021.

³⁹ Sam Roggeveen, ‘Afghanistan holds lessons for American Power in Asia’, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/afghanistan-holds-lessons-american-power-asia>, accessed 12 September 2021.

⁴⁰ Paul Keating, ‘Provoking China to please the US’, <https://johnmenadue.com/provoking-china-to-please-the-us/>, accessed 9 September 2021.

abandonment by a ‘great and powerful’ friend in an increasingly uncertain strategic environment. Current debate in Australia on this topic centres on the need to remain close to, or even get closer to, the United States to ensure that Australia does not face the prospect of abandonment and that Australia can influence US policy to avert a cold war-like confrontation with China. As noted by Alan Dupont, this means Australia could influence US policy but will pay a higher premium for maintaining the US alliance including developing an alliance hub with members of the Quad and more boots on the ground should Australia be drawn into conflicts in the region.⁴¹

9.12 A more effective policy approach for Australia’s long-term future and national interests is for Canberra to promote an environment whereby the United States and China can reach mutual accommodation on the Taiwan imbroglio and on pressing regional issues such as climate change, the ongoing pandemic crisis and natural disasters. This requires a degree of power sharing that is not currently an option for the Biden administration but may become necessary as Chinese influence and power increases over the next decade. For Australia it also means not blindly following US policy and developing a more independent policy. As noted by Geoff Miller, “Australian objectives are not always the same and as recent events have emphasised, US decisions are not always right”.⁴²

9.13 In this context, the Quad Plus has the potential of playing an important role in power sharing and restructuring the regional environment away from cold war-like divisions and potential confrontation. As the Quad Plus concept evolves and becomes a loose network of nations dealing with critical issues affecting the region, it could become an effective grouping with global reach that assists in norm setting. Indeed, as Rudd has argued, the grouping has scope to expand to become a much broader collection of countries that could reshape everything from global

⁴¹ Alan Dupont, ‘China’s threat to the US makes us a power player’, *The Australian* (online) Canberra, ACT, 12 March 2021.

⁴² Geoff Miller, ‘The ANZUS Treat at an uncertain time: Should we rely on it?’, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/the-anzus-treaty-at-an-uncertain-time-should-we-rely-on-it/>, accessed 9 September 2021.

infrastructure funding to supply chains to technology standards.⁴³ Australia is in an excellent position to play an active role in conjunction with other middle powers to influence the agenda setting processes to ensure Quad Plus is an inclusive and open regional mechanism. If the grouping is genuinely inclusive, it is conceivable that China would seek membership based on mutual interests to deal collectively with key problems such as climate change and pandemics.

- 9.14 Whether Australia can grapple with fundamental adjustments necessary to seek genuine regional integration through an inclusive Quad Plus that includes China and emphasise less on bilateral and trilateral security arrangements that are suspicious of China will depend on how the strategic environment pans out over the next decade. The formation of AUKUS suggests that prioritising Quad Plus' non-traditional security issues is highly unlikely in the short to mid-term. If bilateral tensions with China continue to escalate, Australia will be drawn ever more tightly into the Quad and AUKUS security arrangements. This does not bode well for a reset in Australia-China relations for the foreseeable future.

⁴³ Kevin Rudd, 'Why the Quad alarms China?', https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-08-06/why-quad-alarms-china?utm_medium=newsletters&utm_source=twofa&utm_campaign=Why%20the%20Quad%20, accessed 13 August 2021.