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**Reclaiming the Indo-Pacific:
A Political-Military Strategy
for Quad 2.0**

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ABSTRACT

After a decade, officials from India, Japan, Australia and the United States convened in Manila in November 2017 to renew their quadrilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. While the agenda of the quad is still unknown, this paper presents a political-military strategy for the grouping directed at shaping Chinese behaviour in the region. Viewing strategy through the ends-means-ways lens, the paper describes key objectives of dissuasion, deterrence, and defence for the political-military quadrilateral. It describes key means of shared logistics networks, interoperability, and shared ISR and ASW capabilities to meet these ends through joint exercises and defence diplomacy, patrolling and presence operations, and freedom of navigation and overflight maintenance. It also describes the political context and threat perception that informs the strategy presented in this paper.

INTRODUCTION

On 12 November 2017 officials from India, Japan, Australia, and the United States met on the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit in Manila, Philippines to discuss ways to promote cooperation in that vast region that encompasses the Indian and Pacific Oceans. The import of the meeting cannot be overstated. A four-way “quadrilateral” dialogue was

first proposed in 2007 and then jettisoned following the then Australian defence minister Stephen Smith's comments in the presence of a visiting Chinese official. By reconvening a decade later, the quadrilateral (quad, for brevity), like the mythical phoenix, rose from the ashes – or more precisely, the waters of the Indo-Pacific. While no joint statements were issued, and the meeting had the air of tentativeness, it came at a time of unprecedented global flux which some argue is akin to a run-up to a power transition in the international system.¹

Other than a common aim of maintaining a “free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific” or a “rules-based order” in that region, the individual statements from the four countries were different in their emphasis and nuance.² That said, the Manila meeting comes also at a time of unprecedented cooperation at the bilateral and trilateral level between the countries involved. This has included joint naval exercises, defence cooperation, frequent high-level visits as well as recognition in all four capitals that when it comes to China, it can no longer be business as usual. For its part, Beijing – since the beginning of President Xi Jinping's assumption to office in 2013 – has pursued an extremely assertive foreign policy in the region and elsewhere, riding on the back of unprecedented material prosperity as well as nationalist sentiment in the Chinese mainland. Deng Xiaoping's “hide your strength and bide your time” has made way for Xi's publicly-celebrated “China Dream” in which the People's Republic regains its rightful place in the international system. This would involve China emerging as a hegemonic power in Asia, a prospect that makes all countries in the region uncomfortable, not the least because such a repositioning could stand to upend the liberal order that has contributed so much to Asian prosperity over the last four decades.

The agenda for the quad is not known; the initiative in its new avatar is nascent. National capitals are also understandably cautious in publicly detailing a plan of action, for reasons that include apprehension about inadvertently stepping on Chinese toes. The standard issues that permeate any multilateral balancing arrangement – of free riding and defection³ – are also in the minds of policy-makers in the states involved. Recall that Quad 1.0 ended where all parties involved – and Australia, most explicitly – got cold feet considering the potential consequence of the grouping for their individual bilateral relationships with Beijing. Proposals from scholars and analysts have included an economic cooperation agenda, designed to offer smaller states in the Indo-Pacific an alternative to Chinese finance and other economic *adducement* as well as political-military cooperation of an underspecified type. However, most of the voluminous literature that has been generated around the quad since the November 2017 meeting has looked at the politics of the nascent grouping as opposed to spelling out a concrete strategy for it. Detailed discussion of military aspects of quadrilateral cooperation in this new version is absent in extant policy literature.

This paper seeks to fill this gap by laying out a political-military strategy – in the sense of a military strategy that involves two or more powers acting cooperatively⁴ – for the quad while being agnostic about the significant expenditure of political capital or will that would be required to put the said strategy into practice. This is not to say that politics is unimportant; it is. But many good discussions of the politics of the quadrilateral grouping already exists, and reasons of space prohibit the author from making further excursions into that subject.⁵ The paper focuses on the hard-security dimension of quadrilateral cooperation not because it considers other cooperational arrangements (economic, for example) less important but because security concerns around

China's rise – much like Banquo's ghost in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* – drives the entire narrative around why one would need such cooperation in the first place. Concretely, the paper presents a political-military strategy for the quad using the ends-ways-means construct: it proposes a three-fold set of 'ends' revolving around dissuasion, deterrence, and defence with supporting 'ways' and 'means'. Table 1 summarises the strategy:

Table 1: A Political-Military Strategy for the Quad

Achieve (Ends)	Through (Ways)	Using (Means)
1. Dissuasion	1. Joint exercises and defence diplomacy	1. Logistics networks
2. Deterrence	2. Patrolling and presence operations	2. Interoperability
3. Defence	3. FON/FOO maintenance	3. ISR and ASW capabilities

The paper focuses on the 'hows' and 'whys' of each of the elements in the strategy proposed with a view towards identifying bottlenecks so that they could be removed, whether that is material, structural, or ideational. It goes without saying that the strategy that has been proposed in this paper is far from being completely fleshed out. The paper aims merely to describe key signposts to be met should the quad indeed acquire a hard political-military shape. It is based on extensive interviews with serving officials from all of the four countries involved, on record as well as on 'no-attribution' basis, as well as on conversations that took place with influential and senior former officials. Some interviews were also conducted in deep background, to corroborate information that is not publicly available due to their sensitivity.

The paper is organised in the following manner. The next section presents a brief account of the political context of the quad in its current avatar. The section after that presents the ends, or the objectives of the

strategy, while the successive sections lay down the 'means' and the 'ways'. The paper concludes with a set of political observations regarding the quad in the Indian context.

POLITICAL CONTEXT OF QUAD 2.0

The broad context that drove decisions in the four capitals to revive the quadrilateral is structural, related to the simultaneous (relative) decline of the United States and the emergence of China as an assertive great power. The former has paved way – by definition – for an economically and politically multipolar international system. As Randall Schweller has provocatively argued, this 'third-image' shift also explains the improbable election of Donald Trump to the US presidency in 2016.⁶ Trump's election, in turn, has amplified US calls for greater burden sharing – often in sharply transactional terms – in maintaining regional security architectures in Europe and the Indo-Pacific.⁷ With the 45th president of the United States, a moment of almost-oxymoronic 'transactional multilateralism' may be upon the international order, where America's pursuit of multilateral arrangements may be less motivated by liberal internationalism and more by an interest in seeing other countries do more together with – and for – the US. The quad, should it fructify, will be the first large project along these lines.

Alliance arrangements – and indeed for the quad to have any politico-military meaning, it has to be one, if only in spirit and not letter – only arise in a certain international context when extant balance of power stands to be upset. In case of the quad, China's assertiveness in the recent past has provided such a context. Since the beginning of Xi Jinping's first term as president in 2013, Chinese foreign policy has begun to act commensurately with its economic heft. China has assumed revisionist positions with respect to a number of international

issues in the Indo-Pacific. They include construction of artificial islands as well as air-defence identification zones in the South and East China Seas on the basis of specious historical claims that disregard international law and conventions; establishing what could become dual-use facilities in the Indian Ocean as well as one overt naval base; and, increasingly and most disturbingly, asserting itself in domestic politics of many countries in the region.⁸ Future historians could very well look at July 2016 – when Beijing summarily rejected the UNCLOS verdict in a maritime dispute with the Philippines⁹ – as the beginning of China's quest to reject accepted international structures and rules. However, one can also argue that China's historical record on accepting sovereignty of other states – whether that be Tibet or Taiwan – has always be spotty and there is nothing new about its revisionism and rejection of the rules-based order.

In terms of concrete military steps that China is taking in the region, it has vigorously pursued power-projection capabilities including a robust aircraft carrier programme as well as supported construction of regional denial complexes that stand to decouple the security of its neighbours from the threat of US assertion should they be imperilled.¹⁰ It has also pursued a strategy of 'grey-zone coercion' to enforce its maritime claims using incrementalism, maritime militia, lawfare, and aggressive narrative-building that seeks to ensure that its activities do not cross a threshold that would provoke a military response from the US or other regional powers.¹¹ China has also aggressively used geoeconomics – understood to mean the application of economic tools as part of geopolitical statecraft – to punish, co-opt, and/or otherwise subdue smaller powers that could contest its pursuit of regional primacy.¹² Using geoeconomic tools, it has also challenged the core foreign-policy orientation of many small states in the Indian Ocean, most notably, Sri Lanka, in the recent past.

China's assertiveness has directly and indirectly affected Australia, Japan, and India. In case of Australia, it has long played a delicate game of balancing its economic interests in China – PRC accounted for 34 percent of Australia's total exports in 2016, for example¹³ – with its traditional security alliance with the United States. Indeed, fear of Australian defection in any multilateral security arrangement directed at shaping China's behaviour is one of the reasons why such arrangements have had a hard time taking off the ground in the first place. However, allegations that surfaced mid-2017 – of serious and large-scale Chinese intelligence operations to influence Australian politics and society – have rung alarm bells in Canberra.¹⁴ It is not known what role such revelations played in Australia adopting a significantly harder line towards China, as evinced from the late 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper. However, Australia's publicly acknowledged stance on the South China Sea has been noted, in Beijing and elsewhere.

The Japan-China relationship also continues to be fraught, driven both by history and contemporary events. In 2013, PRC imposed an air defence identification zone over the Senkaku islands in the East China Sea, leading the then US President Barack Obama to reaffirm the US-Japan alliance treaty. Following the re-election of Shinzo Abe in 2017, Japan will continue to shed its baggage from the past, perhaps moving towards significantly revising its pacifist Constitution.¹⁵ It has also reached out to other major regional powers, most notably India. While Japan, like Australia, will have to walk a tightrope between its economic and strategic interests, under Abe it is clear that it will also aggressively protect its security needs and move to meet them in creative ways. The quad will certainly be an instrument that Prime Minister Abe will actively support, given that the notion was first promoted by him, as a “democratic security diamond” in the region.¹⁶

Finally, 2016 and 2017 have been pivotal in reshaping India's perception of China, principally because of a set of four events. First, in 2016, India's much-publicised bid to obtain membership in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) failed, largely due to Beijing's opposition. India has long considered membership in export-control cartels as key steps in its emergence as a great power. China's vocal opposition to India's ambition in this regard was noted in New Delhi. Second, in the past few years, China has also opposed the sanctioning of a Pakistan-based religious extremist, Masood Azhar, through the UNSC 1267 committee. Azhar is accused by India of orchestrating serious terrorist attacks on Indian soil, the last of which was a thwarted attack on an Indian air force base in January 2016.

Third, China has – through its Belt-Road Initiative (BRI) – sought to build a China-Pakistan Economic Corridor that would pass through parts of Kashmir that India claims to be its own. The BRI has been viewed in New Delhi as a key Chinese geostrategic instrument to shape the Indian Ocean littorals. New Delhi took an unprecedented step to snub Beijing on the initiative by first boycotting a key meeting around it, in April 2017, and then issuing a strong critique of the whole effort. Fourth and most notably, India and China found themselves amidst a tense military stand-off for two-and-half months beginning the middle of June 2017 over a Chinese road construction activity near the China-Bhutan-India tri-junction.

This is the broad political context in which the November 2017 Manila meeting of the quad took place after a decade.

ENDS

In order to develop a strategy for the quad, the first question that needs to be answered relates to the grand – albeit, unstated at this stage –

political-military objectives for the grouping. Put another way, the task at hand is to obtain a political-military 'translation' of the stated desire of the parties involved for a 'free and open Indo-Pacific'. While the individual statements following the November 2017 meeting on the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit did not explicitly enunciate them, conversations with officials from the countries involved as well as writings of formers present some answers. The overall picture that emerges is that of a grouping that is geared for balancing the rise of China – and its implications for the Indo-Pacific as a global commons.

An influential Indian Navy (IN) officer, Gurpreet Khurana, described the primary political-military objective of the quad as “‘Strategic Deterrence’ vis-a-vis China for individual countries, with the overarching effect of moderating China's behaviour, including in terms of adherence to international law and norms of conduct”. Khurana, though, also notes that such security logic would have to be buttressed with non-traditional regional security efforts in order to legitimise the grouping.¹⁷ A former senior IN official went even further, and at a public event described the grand objective behind the quad as “containment” of China, with the grouping as a political-military instrument that only falls short of coercive diplomacy.¹⁸

Others had more expansive notions in mind about the quad's central objectives even though China's assertiveness looms large in their imagination as well. While a former IN officer described the official Indian position on the quad as that of a “flexible arrangement” without political-military content at the moment, he conceded that it has no other logic than balancing China.¹⁹ A former senior United States Navy (USN) officer put assurance of smaller Asian states front-and-centre as a grand goal for the quad. He noted that the quad should aim for “a version of the “Panchasheel— Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence”,

interpreted to reassure Asian nations that they have freedom of choice re[garding] Chinese political, economic, and military pressure,” with freedom-of-navigation (FON) as a core political-military objective.²⁰ Australian officials described their country's priority as “consolidation of existing arrangements”—presumably hinting at the need for Australia to be a participant in the Malabar Exercise – even as they noted that they were “open minded about how the [Manila] meeting might evolve.”²¹ While China does indeed loom large over the quad's nascent efforts, other officials have expressed their concern that it may be difficult to move on that basis alone.²² Other conversations in deep background have brought to fore the notion that the eventual goal of the quad would be to create a security architecture for the Indo-Pacific, with “like-minded countries working together to ensure the resilience of our region at a time of unprecedented geostrategic, economic and technological change,” as Australian officials have described it.²³

Based on these conversations, it becomes clear that a hard yet defensive political-military strategy for the quad should be one of “3Ds.” It should aim to (1) *dissuade* China from reshaping the Indo-Pacific order in general in face of a potential regional power transition and, in particular, dissuade it from the pursuit of anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) strategies that stand to change the open character of the maritime commons; (2) *deter* PRC from pursuit of strategies of 'grey-zone coercion' which seeks to avoid a military response through the pursuit of “ambiguity, asymmetry, and incrementalism”²⁴ to maintain the free character of the region; (3) (individually and collectively) *defend* – in the event that dissuasion and deterrence fail – the *free and open* character of the Indo-Pacific in general by preserving sea lines of communication (SLOCs). The objectives of the 3D strategy are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: The 3D Strategy for the Quad

	What	Why	When
Dissuade	A2/AD strategies	Open Indo-Pacific	Now
Deter	Gray-zone coercion	Free Indo-Pacific	Now
Defend	FON/FOO and SLOCs	Free and open Indo-Pacific	In the future

Dissuasion

A2/AD strategies – which support the creation of regional denial complexes—pose a significant challenge to the rules-based order, in the Indo-Pacific and elsewhere. As Rehman put it in a 2015 essay, “the rapid metastasis of these regional denial complexes—what NATO top commander Gen. Phillip Breedlove has referred to as “A2/AD bubbles” —risks upsetting the foundations of the liberal international order by expanding spaces of enclosure or instability.”²⁵ Crucially, A2/AD strategies could neutralise FON and freedom-of-overflight (FOO) abilities. China's pursuit of A2/AD strategies, including that of deploying DF-21D and DF-26 anti-ship ballistic missile systems as well as air defence systems such as the Russian-made S-300,²⁶ is well known and much discussed in the strategic literature. It has also recently come to light – following close examination of open-source Chinese military writings – that the PRC's A2/AD strategy has an anti-submarine warfare (ASW) component through an ocean-floor surveillance network.²⁷

Faced with China's A2/AD capabilities directed at the US – which could in effect establish Chinese maritime hegemony in East Asia by preventing the US from coming to the rescue of China's neighbours – American analysts have argued the case for an “active denial” strategy. In this strategy, the US should aid China's neighbours in East Asia with

their own A2/AD efforts to negate PRC power projection into their areas of interest in peacetime, and through shared intelligence-surveillance-reconnaissance (ISR) facilities in war-time coupled with limited kinetic involvement.²⁸ An active-denial strategy is fundamentally dissuasive, and gradualist in its orientation. Strategic dissuasion seeks to prevent provocations not through the direct threat of military retaliation in a crisis (which is the logic of deterrence) but “thwart and frustrate hostile steps through countervailing measures” in the run-up to one.²⁹ And for all of the concern about Chinese A2/AD capabilities, they are mostly nascent at the moment, as Stephen Biddle and Ivan Oelrich demonstrate in a 2016 paper.³⁰ A strategy of dissuasion is therefore more appropriate than that of strategic deterrence. The quad, by adopting a dissuasive strategy to counter Chinese A2/AD strategy, will also mitigate against locking the countries involved and China in a security dilemma. It reassures nations in the Indo-Pacific of their choice vis-a-vis Chinese military pressure and help them hold the line.

Deterrence

Analysts have noted that China's strategy for hegemony in East Asia also rests to a significant degree on the pursuit of 'grey-zone coercion'. This is taken to mean undertaking a series of actions that advance Chinese geostrategic objectives without crossing the tripwire for a conventional military response from the United States and its allies. As examples of such coercion, CSIS analysts have noted the declaration of an air-defence identification zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea in 2013 as well as the Spratly Island reclamation efforts since that year.³¹ They identify four distinct forms of such coercion: “contesting physical control, contesting rules and norms,³² exploiting physical control, and exploiting rules and norms” and note that Chinese grey-zone coercion

typically involves ambiguity, pursuit of asymmetric strategies (including the use of proxies and militia) and so-called “salami-slicing” to gradually change facts on the ground. Like A2/AD, grey zone coercion too is a serious challenge to the liberal international order.³³

Beyond the pursuit of grey-zone coercion in maritime Asia designed to circumvent US commitments, China has used such a strategy also along its continental borders. The 2017 India-China standoff in Doklam was a direct result of China making what it assumed others to have perceived as an incremental addition to its border construction activity along the undefined Sino-Bhutanese border. What ensued was a textbook 'Three Warfares' campaign against India which, as analysts have already noted, is also part of Chinese grey-zone coercion.³⁴ Its pursuit of 'debt-trap diplomacy'³⁵ – to use a phrase popularised by Brahma Chellaney – in the Indian Ocean also has the hallmarks of grey-zone coercion through economic leverage. The recent and mounting evidence of Chinese influence operations in Australia – including Australian citizens of Chinese origin – can also be seen as further examples.

The quad should, in pursuit of a free Indo-Pacific, develop strategies of tailored deterrence against grey-zone coercion in the region. CSIS analysts note that tightening alliance relationships should be a key US response to contestation and/or exploitation of physical control through such coercion by the PRC.³⁶ The very act of a strengthening quadrilateral relationship – along with deeper bilateral relationship between the US and the other three actors – will signal deterrence against such efforts by PRC. It should be noted, however, that such strengthening can only take place if there is greater political congruence between the quad countries vis-à-vis a common understanding of Chinese objectives in the region.

Defence

Should dissuasion and deterrence fail, the final sub-objective of the quad—the defence of SLOCs and FON/FOO—is the most controversial, given the presence of a non-treaty-ally, India, in the grouping. The US shares treaty alliance with both Japan and Australia. In case of the one with Japan, it commits the US to come to Japan's military aid in event of war; the provision of the Australia-New Zealand-US (ANZUS) treaty are somewhat weaker, allowing for some limited intervention by member parties in order to come to each other's aid. Indeed, after China imposed an ADIZ over the Senkaku Islands in 2013,³⁷ the then US President Obama reaffirmed Washington's treaty commitments to Tokyo.³⁸

Such an arrangement does not exist with India, and domestic political compulsions in New Delhi prevent the fructification of such an arrangement with the US in the present and unlikely to happen in the future. The Indian position of strategic autonomy is too ingrained in its strategic culture for that to be reversed, absent a serious shock. This obviously limits what the quad can or cannot do together (without a formal treaty alliance between the US and India). There are also instances of the two countries sharing different notions of FON in the past.³⁹ (More on this is discussed in a latter section of this paper.) However, the quad should move ahead under the assumption that even without such a formal treaty alliance between the two countries, cooperative arrangements can be made towards an informal mutual-defence arrangement. At the same time, lessons from past largely-inconsequential plurilateral security arrangements—such as the Five Powers Defence Arrangements between the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore—should be kept in

mind while developing informal cooperative security solutions within the quad.

What would matter more than anything else is a clear signalling of capabilities—in order to project a tacit convention of mutual defence under contingencies within the quadrilateral, though not exclusively in the maritime theatre. A retired senior USN officer averred that such demonstrations at the bilateral level could include FON, and cooperation on maritime domain awareness (MDA), to begin with, and “then spiral to ASW/ P-8 operations, AEGIS cooperation, and possibly BMD [cooperation].”⁴⁰ It should also include – as the paper describes below – key means that signal the credibility of an albeit-informal security arrangement such as the political-military quad.

MEANS

The preceding section described the quad's political-military 'ends' of 3Ds: dissuasion, deterrence, and defence. These ends are to be met using three key means which are described in this section: (1) developing shared logistics networks and arrangements; (2) enhancing interoperability between personnel and platforms; and (3) shared ISR and ASW capabilities.

Logistics networks

The first 'means' to a quadrilateral political-military strategy is development of shared logistics networks and arrangements. On this front, the “Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement” (LEMOA) signed by India and the US in August 2016 was a welcome first step. Under the LEMOA, the two sides will be able to use each other's facilities for repairs and replenishment of fuel and other supplies.⁴¹ While at its

heart the LEMOA is nothing but a codified process – and the US and India have, in the past, indeed used each other's facilities on an ad-hoc basis⁴² – the symbolic import of the agreement was tremendous. However, no such agreement exists between India and Australia, nor between India and Japan. This, to a large extent, is due to differences in areas of emphasis for the countries involved. For example, Japan's main interest is in the 'Pacific' part of the Indo-Pacific due to its economic interests⁴³ while India's is, understandably, in the Indian Ocean region. Of note is the fact that Japan and Australia signed an “Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement” (ACSA) in January 2017 that would push logistics cooperation between the two countries in addition to an earlier agreement in the form of “reciprocal provision of supplies and services.”⁴⁴ However, the IN chief, Admiral Sunil Lanba, recently indicated that India “was negotiating similar [to LEMOA] pacts with a number of other countries.”⁴⁵ Whether that includes Japan and Australia remains to be seen.

Interoperability

The second 'means' to the ends described above would be greater interoperability between the militaries of the four states involved. Once again, because of treaty alliances, there is excellent bilateral interoperability between the US and Australia, and the US and Japan. For example, interoperability between JMSDF and USN has been enhanced due to collocation of commands.⁴⁶ Platforms interoperability between Japan and Australia is also expected to be on par, given that the US remains a significant source of military hardware for both countries. It is India that stands to be of concern in this regard in the nascent arrangement. When it comes to personnel interoperability between India and Japan, the principal issue is, as officials note, the language barrier.⁴⁷ One former IN officer went as far as to call the Japanese

“highly insular,” hindering greater interoperability.⁴⁸ It is also hampered given the different origins of major platforms: JMSDF uses US systems while key IN platforms are of Russian origin. Crucially, greater interoperability towards ASW is hampered by the absence of secure data-transmission links.⁴⁹ This is not to argue that the two countries have not made strides in interoperability: IN officers credit Japanese participation in the MALABAR exercises as a key contributor towards the same.⁵⁰

Interoperability between USN and IN have also improved significantly. Officials on both sides express satisfaction at the distance the two countries have traversed in this regard, principally due to their participation in the MALABAR exercises. A former senior USN officer noted that greater interoperability could be assured by: “[Higher] [f]requency of operating together at sea, planning together ashore, [and] attending each other's schools, from tactical classroom to PME [professional military education].”⁵¹ Platforms also remained a concern for this officer who noted, “I assume Indian ships obtained from the prior Soviet Union retain damage control systems/infrastructure that by U.S. standards would be inadequate.”⁵² Former IN officers also agree with the view – recently echoed by an Indian analyst⁵³ – that platforms remain an issue in greater interoperability.⁵⁴ However, no one who was interviewed for this paper claimed that platform differences were in any way an insurmountable roadblock towards greater interoperability. One view that was expressed was that platform differences are irrelevant for lower-end yet important cooperation on HADR and fuel exchanges.

A recent CSIS study has argued that joint command-and-control (C2) is a key step for allied interoperability to shape the operating environment in maritime Asia. It proposed a three-stage evolution

towards a joint C2 structure “or allied interoperability across spectrum of threats, including grey-zone coercion, as a step towards a “more inclusive and flexible regional security order.”⁵⁵ According to this proposal of Scott and Shearer, this approach to joint C2 in the Indo-Pacific will eventually lead to the annotation of one US Pacific Command (PACOM) HQ as the headquarters for combined operations and patrols.⁵⁶ Once again, India's status as a non-ally of the United States stands to complicate its inclusion in such an arrangement. India has traditionally eschewed joint C2 other than operating under the UN flag, preferring a coordinated approach to multinational C2.⁵⁷ However, the Indian armed forces seems to be moving towards a more flexible approach. The recently-published “Joint Training Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces” (JTD-2017), for example, indicated that India could indeed establish joint C2 for certain operations in order to enhance interoperability with friendly foreign countries (FFCs).⁵⁸

A side note: While this paper's understanding of interoperability has predominantly revolved around navies coming together, the ultimate strategic effects of deterrence, dissuasion, and defence – the ends for the political-military quad, as identified in this paper – involve interoperability across the services of the four countries, between US Air Force and the Indian Army, for example. This 'diagonal interoperability' – which meshes 'horizontal interoperability' of similar services of different countries and 'vertical interoperability' between services of the same country⁵⁹ – will ultimately be of greatest significance. Unfortunately, at this moment such diagonal interoperability is a bridge too far into the future, and was thus not examined further here.

ISR and ASW cooperation

Interoperability rests crucially on the ability of all actors involved to securely exchange classified information, including ISR and MDA, to obtain a common operating picture. Given that the US and India are yet to ink the proposed “Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement” (COMCASA, formerly known as CISMOA), India is not part of a CENTRIXS arrangement with the US. This is not the case with the US and the remaining two actors in the quad: Australia is part of the CENTRIXS-CFE (CENTRIXS Four Eyes) arrangement, while Japan and the US can securely communicate using the CENTRIXS-J network. This is an area of significant difference that must be resolved for the political-military quad to have more salience.

India remains sceptical about entering into a data-sharing agreement with the US – beyond ad-hoc arrangements as part of MALABAR exercises – due to its concerns about the presence of a Pakistan Navy officer stationed in the US 5th Fleet HQ in Bahrain,⁶⁰ as part of the CENTCOM Partner Network (which merged CENTRIXS-ISAF and CENTRIXS-GCTF). Specifically, some IN officers remain cautious about the claim from the US side – independently claimed by two US experts to this author – that regional CENTRIXS nets do not automatically interface with each other without explicit authorization from all parties involved.⁶¹ As an example, US experts bring out the case of CENTRIXS-J and CENTRIXS-Korea that did not interface prior to November 2016, when Japan and the ROK signed a “General Sharing of Military Intelligence Agreement” (GSOMIA).⁶² However, if the Indian concern with the CENTRIXS arrangement is solely due to the Pakistan/5th Fleet angle – and it is not a priori clear that is the sole reason behind India's reservations – the recent downturn in the US-Pakistan relationship could escalate into Pakistan being removed from such an arrangement.

This, in turn, could pave the way for the signing of COMCASA. However, it is not clear whether the resistance to the COMCASA rests with the Indian political establishment or the armed forces. The JTD-2017 released by the Integrated Defence Staff HQ, for example, is surprisingly forward looking on the need of intelligence-sharing with FFCs.⁶³

Whatever be the case, the lack of a secure communications network shared by India and the US is hampering further cooperation on ASW using the Poseidon-8I (P-8I) fleet, either bilaterally or in a quadrilateral arrangement. A former senior USN officer noted that the “U.S.-Norway-UK signed a trilateral agreement for MARPAT/P8, etc operations in the North Atlantic earlier this year [2017],” remarking that it would be “wonderful” if the quad – all of whose members maintain P8 fleets – could come to an analogous arrangement.⁶⁴ Officials from another relevant Indo-Pacific country also echoed the importance of secure data links for ASW.⁶⁵ Beyond the issue of secure intelligence-sharing for the P-8 fleets of the quadrilateral countries, a former IN officer expressed hope that Japan-India cooperation on developing undersea sensors in the Indian Ocean region (along the lines of what Japan has already deployed in the eastern Pacific⁶⁶) could further ASW cooperation and deter Chinese power projection into the area.⁶⁷ However, even without the intelligence-sharing issue being resolved, Japan and India have begun exercising for ASW since October 2017.⁶⁸ Japan and India have also agreed to induct the Japanese Kawasaki P-1 aircraft in the 2018 MALABAR Exercise.⁶⁹ Should Australia also be invited to this – as it is now expected following the November 2017 Manila meeting – ASW warfare will feature prominently in the quad's strategy.

WAYS

Exercises, defence diplomacy and outreach

Four-way and bilateral exercises remain invaluable for the quad: both as ways to enhance preparedness as well as signal said preparedness to the adversary. As an official from an involved Indo-Pacific state remarked, through the MALABAR exercises “everybody can see what we can do together.”⁷⁰ Indeed and as expected, the induction of Australia into the 2018 MALABAR exercise will be a key step in such signalling and to build the requisite capability jointly. Even though Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and IN conduct joint exercises through AUSINDEX (and multilaterally in RIMPAC and MILAN), bilateral progress has been nascent. The induction of Australia in the MALABAR arrangement will help bring the two navies in sync. As Gurpreet Khurana noted, “there would be immense disparity between MALABAR and AUSINDEX in terms of the level of interoperability that has been achieved so far. The reasons for such difference are not difficult to fathom. The MALABAR began way back in 1992, and has now graduated to complex multi-dimensional exercises [...] Relatively, even though the two serials of AUSINDEX have progressed extremely well, and its 'trajectory' is very promising, interoperability between IN and RAN is still at a nascent level.”⁷¹

Beyond the issues of signalling and capacity building, joint exercises also enhance interoperability and capacity building through technical cooperation. For example, as the cooperation through the US-India Joint Working Group on Aircraft Carrier Technology Cooperation (JWGACTC) progresses,⁷² its effect on the MALABAR exercise will most certainly be felt, acting as a multiplier. A US academic affiliated with the US Air Force (USAF) expressed hope that the quad exercises will also

have a significant airforce-airforce component enhancing interoperability through familiarity with air frames used by one another.⁷³

With time, the quad could evolve into a “quad plus” arrangement involving smaller and extra-regional powers.⁷⁴ While noting that a “quad plus” configuration was “premature” right now, Singh had expressed hope that with time, Singapore could become important for the arrangement.⁷⁵ However, the defence minister of that country, on a recent visit to New Delhi, ruled out Singapore's participation in that arrangement. Other natural choices for a partner in a quad-plus arrangement could be France which has a significant naval presence in the Horn of Africa⁷⁶ and Indonesia, a significant naval power that India has offered to train in ASW in the past.⁷⁷ Yet other possibilities for the quad would be to engage in capacity building for smaller Indo-Pacific states such as Vietnam and Philippines as they counter Chinese assertiveness in the maritime space. A softer form of quad cooperation with smaller powers could be in the realm of HADR – which after all was the root of the grouping coming together following the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004. Khurana has argued that such engagement would also provide legitimacy to the grouping.⁷⁸

Patrolling and presence operations

One of the key ways through which the political-military quad could demonstrate its commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific managed within a rules-based architecture is through joint patrolling of SLOCS and presence operations in uncontested as well as contested waters. (The last would come under the rubric of FON operations and would be discussed separately elsewhere this section.) These should include both surface and subsurface fleets and establish play a key role in dissuading

A2/AD strategies, grey-zone coercion and, most importantly, signal ability to defend SLOC security should dissuasion and deterrence fail.

This would entail developing common and shared understanding of openness, specifically legitimacy of claims of states in accordance to international laws. This should not be a matter only of contesting Chinese claims, but should also include developing a framework to deal with overlapping claims between friendly states, such as Taiwan and Japan. It will involve normative acceptance of the Indo-Pacific as a single strategic entity *with an agreed-upon definition*, the *entirety* of it being of interest to all four states. It will also involve developing extensive interoperability for the navies in questions. Having delved into the latter in an earlier section, a few remarks on the former are in order.

Even when it comes to the definition of the “Indo-Pacific”, there is no clear agreement on what the term means operationally. In Gurpreet Khurana's original definition, “[t]he term 'Indo-Pacific' refers to the maritime space comprising the Indian Ocean and the western Pacific. Littoral to it are the states of Asia (including West Asia/ Middle East) and eastern Africa.”⁷⁹ To contrast this with the US definition, per the 2017 US National Security Strategy, the Indo-Pacific extends “from the west coast of India to the western shores of the United States [...]”⁸⁰ The 2017 Australian definition is even narrower, defining the Indo-Pacific “as the region ranging from the eastern Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean connected by Southeast Asia, including India, North Asia and the United States.”⁸¹ The Indian government has so far avoided presenting its own definition of the term. While it is clear that the IN would take it to mean including the entire Indian Ocean – from Gulf of Aden to the Malacca Straits – given that it is its primary area of responsibility (AOR),⁸² the Indian foreign office would look at the Indo-Pacific as the

geopolitical site to implement its Act East policy. Greater inter-ministerial coordination within the Indian government is needed to obtain an official Indian definition of the region. That said, the nature of any maritime theatre is that of fluidity, and concrete efforts at cooperation should not be held hostage to a first formal definitional agreement.

And yet, definitions matter. Take US and Indian naval cooperation in the Indian Ocean as an example. Through the MALABAR exercises as well as other mechanisms, the USN and IN have focused on the eastern Indian Ocean and western Pacific. IN has extensively engaged with the US PACOM whose AOR extends – as PACOM Commander Admiral Harry Harris is fond of reminding audiences in New Delhi – “from Hollywood to Bollywood.” What happens in waters off the coast of Bollywood, the Arabian Sea, as an example, is a different matter altogether. Western Indian Ocean is the responsibility of the US CENTCOM and the Bahrain-based USN 5th Fleet.⁸³ Operational engagement between the US CENTCOM and the IN Western Command remains minimal. A unified approach to the Indo-Pacific – in the broad original sense of the term promoted by Indian strategists, to stretch from East Africa and western Indian Ocean to the western coastline of the United States – would see greater USN-IN cooperation both on the east of India as well as its west to the extent the political divergences between the two countries about littorals of the western Indian Ocean can be managed.⁸⁴ This becomes especially important given recent Chinese push to establish a robust forward presence in the western Indian Ocean, starting with China's first overseas naval base in Djibouti and the possibility of a second base adjacent to the Gwadar port in Pakistan.⁸⁵

Once a common and consistent understanding of the region is obtained, joint exercises, joint forward presence operations, and joint patrolling⁸⁶ to secure SLOCs in the event they are threatened in a crisis—a key objective of a political-military quad – should take place throughout the entire geopolitical theatre and not be focussed on only parts that are contested or, indeed, only of exclusive interest to the four actors. This strategy would ensure that the quad is viewed as a legitimate and unitary actor in maritime Indo-Pacific. By focusing on uncontested waters as well as contested ones, it would help ameliorate any security dilemma with the PRC to a considerable extent.

This is not to say that the quad's patrolling activities should only be non-competitive. At the first edition of the Raisina Dialogue in 2016, PACOM commander Harris had suggested in a speech both India-US joint patrolling of the South China Sea as well as reviving the quad.⁸⁷ While Harris' proposal was almost immediately rejected by the then Indian defence minister Manohar Parrikar,⁸⁸ one of the concrete steps that IN should take in creating a political-military quad is to revisit its position on joint patrols in general – currently IN only conducts coordinated patrolling (CORPAT)⁸⁹ – while leaving the question of joint patrolling in contested waters to the political leadership. On its part, the Indian political leadership should shed archaic notions of resident and “extra-regional powers” in the Indian Ocean and the exclusiveness the terminology implies.⁹⁰ This gambit will facilitate the quad's legitimacy as well as open up space for a greater Indian presence in parts of maritime Asia others consider to be their exclusive preserve, such as part of the South China Sea. Put differently, India should pay heed to China's claim that “the Indian Ocean is not India's ocean” provided the Chinese are made to accept that South China Sea is not China's southern sea.

FON/FOO maintenance

This brings this paper to the subject of FON and FOO. In conversations with officials conducted for this paper, it became clear that FON – and its aerial counterpart, FOO – is perhaps the most crucial challenge facing the Indo-Pacific at a time of heightened multi-way contest arising from the rise of China as a significant naval power. Yet, Australia and India have been quite reluctant in the past to be part of FONOPs in the South China Sea, or even jointly patrol the region with non-quad powers.⁹¹ As late as March 2017, Australia turned away from a proposal to jointly patrol the South China Sea with Indonesia (even though others have accused Indonesia from backing down from its own proposal⁹²). Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, in turning down the proposal, noted: “We are not going to undertake any actions which would increase tensions in the South China Sea.”⁹³ Australia has also been reluctant to join US-led FONOPs there in the past.⁹⁴ Among the quad powers, only Japan has agreed to jointly patrol the South China Sea with the US⁹⁵ even though, admittedly, Australia has angered China in the South China Sea with hundreds of maritime surveillance flights.⁹⁶

For India, the issue at hand is at once conceptual and political. Putative regard for Chinese sensitivities – and consequences, should they be disregarded⁹⁷ – aside, the conceptual issue arises out of differing notions of what constitutes freedom of navigation with the US.⁹⁸ This conceptual dissonance between two friendly powers has led to the US carrying out FONOPs against India as recently as 2015. A key task at hand for the quad is to have a common and consistent understanding of what FON and FOO means, and then undertake concrete steps to preserve them. For India, that would require a careful relook at the Maritime Zones of India (Regulation and Fishing by Foreign Vessels)

Act, bringing it in conformity with the common understanding, for example. Other than operational assertions, the US FON Programme also includes diplomatic communications, and bilateral and multilateral consultations as part of its response toolkit.⁹⁹ The quadrilateral powers will be well advised to coordinate their positions through the latter instruments, as an honest first step. They should also, as part of their public diplomacy toolkit, sensitise the international community to accepted norms around FON and FOO to counter China's claims that its maritime activities do not pose any challenge to the accepted order. However, operational assertions will remain important and the ability to jointly make them a key future step for grouping.

CONCLUSION


This paper presented a political-military strategy for quad 2.0 following the November 2017 meeting of Indian, Japanese, Australian, and American officials on the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit in Manila. Conceptually, the paper took an ends-means-ways approach to strategising: with the dissuasion, deterrence, and defence objectives in mind, the paper described the ways through which these can be met – through joint exercises and defence diplomacy, patrolling and presence operations, and FON/FOO maintenance – using logistical networks, interoperability as well as ISR and ASW cooperation. At its core, this paper was an exercise in planning. Domestic political considerations largely took a back seat.

This is not to argue that such considerations are unimportant; far from it. They become particularly relevant for India as it does not have a treaty alliance with the United States – unlike Australia and Japan – and is unlikely to have one in the coming future. The key juncture that

Indian policy-makers will find themselves arriving at, should they decide to push for an effective quad, is managing the different requirements of internal and external balancing. Explicitly: If India's focus is on internal balancing then platform and systems acquisition will not depend on the degree to which the said equipment is interoperable with other forces. However, if there is a marked shift towards external balancing – which would be the case if the quad acquires a pronounced security dimension along the lines of what has been suggested in this paper – then interoperability becomes paramount.

A related point is the importance of the two remaining foundational agreements that are yet to be signed between the US and India: COMCASA and BECA. It took over ten years for LEMOA – the agreement around bilateral logistical support – to be signed. As a former senior US navy officer (one who enjoys close relationship with India and Indians) described it to this author, one can hardly wait ten more years for COMCASA and BECA to be inked. BECA becomes especially pertinent for air force-air force cooperation. In the past, India's 'strategic autonomy' – non-alignment's more palatable avatar – has been marshalled to argue against the case for signing the US-India foundational agreements. A more fundamental point is that while India strives for strategic autonomy, it is China that seeks to impinge on India's strategic space and not the west, and certainly not Australia or Japan. Technical defence cooperation to meet the revisionism of an unsatisfied power cannot be indefinitely held hostage to ideological predilection or shrill voices inside India's political class. This also brings one to the issue of whether the US, given India's continuing flirtation with treating Russia and America on a putative even keel, can or will share sensitive technology, say on ASW, when there is a distinct residual possibility that such technology could be inadvertently leaked to

Moscow. For its part, India must assure the US and the west that its continuing military cooperation with Russia is due to bureaucratic inertia and structural difficulties, and that sensitive technology shared with India will remain closely guarded.

The final point pertains to why India needs a quadrilateral political-military strategy to begin with. As analysts in the governance space are wont to remind their security counterparts, India finds itself juggling to complete its 20th century nation-building project—the chief component of which is poverty eradication—as it attempts to leapfrog to meet the newer disruptions of the 21st century. Given the pressure these multiple projects puts on national resources, there are hard limits to how much the country can spend on defence to fend off Chinese repositioning. Creating external partnership is not a choice; alliances rarely are. Unless Indian diplomacy can find a creative *modus vivendi* with Beijing acceptable to both states, it will necessarily have to accept that playing a balance of power game is the only way out. A quad with teeth will be a key card for India in that game. 

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