



The Quad: Effectiveness of “Cooperation in Peacetime Situations”

The Quad—officially the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a forum joining Japan, Australia, India and the United States—has recently attracted attention, but how much does it actually affect order building in reality. The four countries will need to rid themselves of overestimation, advance functional cooperation, and gradually accumulate steady outcomes.

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FOIP for Japanese diplomacy

—The “Free and Open Indo - Pacific” (FOIP) has become a foreign relations concept shared by Japan and many other countries. In particular, the cooperative relationship of Japan, Australia, India and the United States, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad), is drawing attention.

Satake Tomohiko: The concept of a “free and open international order” that FOIP touts is not necessarily new. Since the Cold War era, Japan has worked together with Australia and others to ensure that free markets, rule of law, and other global norms take hold in the region.

If we consider what has changed since then, it’s the means to realize that order. The primary means for that in the Cold War era were diplomacy and economy, but in the post-Cold War period, the role played by Japan has gradually expanded also in the security field. It was precisely following from that that the concept of “Proactive Contributor to Peace” was proposed.

Another change is the diversification of actors. When speaking of the international order in the Asia-Pacific, the image that usually comes to mind is that of China challenging American hegemony. However, in the Indo-Pacific, the actors involved are not only the United States and China but also Japan, India, Australia, ASEAN and European countries. A pluralistic order is formed where a variety of actors participate and that relativizes the US-China conflict. That kind of meaning might also be contained in FOIP.



Dr. Satake Tomohiko

Ito Toru: As is clear from the use of the “Indo-Pacific” concept rather than the “Asia - Pacific” one, Japan wants to draw India into the framework of the international order. In particular, the Abe administration took an interest in India from an early stage, as indicated by the speech titled “Confluence of the Two Seas” [in August 2007] before the Indian Parliament. Meanwhile, unlike Japan and Australia, India is not in a formal alliance with the United States and despite being a democratic country, it has serious domestic human rights problems. As such, India is a bit of a “swing state” whose future reactions to the promises between Japan, the US and Australia are unknown, so something that needs to be considered is how to make adjustments for these differences.



Prof. Ito Toru

Mori Satoru: The significance of Japan’s regional cooperation initiative has been changing repeatedly in response to the international political and economic context of the time and Japan’s notion about what role it should play. I won’t go over modern Japan’s FOIP history again, but you could say it’s a vision for fostering an open regional order through areas like rule making, economy, development, and security while keeping a primary strategic interest in maritime Asia. By pursuing diplomacy under this vision, Japan appears to fulfill at least two functions.



Prof. Mori Satoru

The first function is that Japan is taking the lead in presenting basic rules and approaches for regulating international relations, thereby stimulating debate in regional countries about what order to aim for as well as providing opportunities for the countries to mutually ascertain how they can resonate and cooperate, at a time when these regional countries are faced with an unpredictable international environment with the emergence of China and US strategic adjustments.

Another Japanese FOIP function is what Dr. Satake referred to as the relativization of the US-China conflict, because as that conflict intensifies, Japan is demonstrating a strategic intention to maintain an inclusive logic and quietly achieve partial neutralization of the divisive dynamics emerging from the great power competition in the areas of the economy and development assistance. By combining these two functions, Japan appears to be able to give regional countries a degree of peace of mind and earn their trust.

Moreover, to be frank, I think the relationship between Japan’s FOIP and the Quad can be understood as that between end and means. That is, one of the various means to realize the vision of FOIP is the Quad. Japanese diplomacy has the vision of cultivating an international order based on rules and expanding what qualifies as regional public goods within that order, and the Quad is one of many means of promotion to make that a reality.

How to understand the military aspects of the Quad

—How do you see the role of the Quad?

Satake: I understand FOIP to be a three-layered structure of (1) geopolitical aspects, (2) socio-economic aspects, and (3) normative aspects. (1) is the foundation of FOIP and is about how to maintain a regional balance of power centering on the Japan-US Alliance. (2) corresponds to infrastructure cooperation and economic development. Finally, (3) is the norms of the rule of law and freedom of navigation.

The Quad contributes to the first layer of geopolitical stability and is expected to play a role of supplementing the Japan-US Alliance. In this sense, I think the essence of the Quad lies in its military aspects and especially cooperation in the area of maritime security, although this does not deny its other roles. I think the key here is how much they are able to involve India in existing cooperation between Japan and the US and between Japan, the US and Australia. But as Professor Ito pointed out, there is a lot of uncertainty in this.

Mori: I suspect Dr. Satake’s understanding of the Quad is close to how the Americans see it. If we look at the “Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific” that the Trump administration formulated in February 2018, it says that the US will “align our Indo-Pacific strategy with those of Australia, India, and Japan. Aim to create a quadrilateral security framework with India, Japan, Australia, and the United States as the principal hubs.” This reflects a clear intention to expand the roles of Japan, Australia, and India in the security field and especially to involve India in the efforts to counterbalance China.



Japan-Australia-India-U.S. Leaders' Video Conference was held on March 12, 2021

Source: Cabinet Public Relations Office

Meanwhile, I don't think Japan thinks of the Quad in terms of security as much as the US does. I suspect the Quad has three roles in Japan's eyes. One role is to share basic values and acknowledge the importance of a free and open international order based on rules with the other three countries as well as to convey to other actors the strength of their involvement and commitment in the Asia-Pacific region. The second is to reconcile perceptions of the regional situation among the four countries at a high level in order to confirm and coordinate the direction of initiatives where they can cooperate. In fact, at the Japan-Australia-India-US Leaders' Video Conference (Quad meeting) in March, 2021, they shared perceptions about the situations in China, Myanmar, North Korea, and elsewhere. In addition to quality infrastructure, there is also maritime security, counter-terrorism, cyber security, and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief. Additionally, the Quad meeting concurred to launch working groups on vaccines, critical and emerging technologies, and climate change.

Ito: I also think Japan places more emphasis on infrastructure cooperation and other economic aspects than does the US. At the same time, India definitely expects cooperation in traditional security, especially with regard to China. But I don't think any of the countries are ready to decisively engage in military cooperation in a real sense.

Satake: Since the early 2000s, the US has urged more cooperation between allies and partner countries like India. For example, Dennis C. Blair, the former commander of US forces in the Pacific region, clearly raised the question of how to build networks in a hub-and-spoke military alliance system, or a "bilateral plus" approach, as a way to deal with various regional risk factors, such as the future emergence of revisionist powers, in a famous coauthored paper published in 2001.

In fact, informal vice-ministerial-level talks between Japan, the US, and Australia started in the 2000s and were upgraded to ministerial-level talks in 2006. The debate initially centered on PKO focused on international public goods and non-traditional security cooperation, but the emergence of China increased the emphasis on traditional security. Current Quad cooperation is primarily "soft," but depending on what China does in the future, they might be considering a strengthening of military cooperation. Of course, whether or not that works out is a different issue...

Mori: It is true that the four countries are aiming to increase mutual operability of equipment and troops as well as strengthen defense cooperation, but I think most experts in Washington see the Quad purely as a framework for "cooperation in peacetime situations" at the moment. I believe that the four countries agree that security and military cooperation is important and that they will develop their defense cooperation, but if you ask me whether the Quad anticipates responses to actual contingencies, I don't think that's the case at least for the time being. This is something we need to consider with composure. For example, if a Taiwan contingency occurs, it is clear that the response has to center on Japan and the US or Japan, the US, and Australia. If we ask whether or not it is expected to become an Asian NATO, I think the possibility is close to none right now.

US, Australia, and India View on the Quad

——What is the Biden administration’s vision for the Quad in the context of FOIP?

Mori: The US considers the Quad an important means to engage the Indo-Pacific region and appears to see it as an indicator of the strength of their involvement and commitment to the region itself. In fact, the Quad meeting in March was held because President Biden invited the heads of Japan, Australia, and India, and after upgrading it from a foreign ministers’ meeting to a summit meeting, they issued their first ever Joint Statement. This is indicative of powerful determination on the part of the US.

As the Trump administration was more apparently confrontational vis-à-vis China and the order pursued was more divisive than not, the Quad also tended to be interpreted as part of that. Because of this, it is true that words of worry and warning were heard from South Korea and some regional countries in Southeast Asia for a while, but many also came to positively view the Quad involvement in security issues.

While the Biden administration does have the competition with China in mind, it attaches great importance to collaboration with allies and partner countries, envisions a strategy for building a stable order in the region, and views the Quad as an important means to stabilize and order the region. The White House’s Kurt Campbell, National Security Council Coordinator for the Indo-Pacific, pointed out in a coauthored paper right before joining the administration that the alliances that the US forms with various countries in various areas (1) ensure balance in the region, (2) build agreement regarding important order-related aspects, and (3) send out warning signals to China that their current course has risks. It could be said that the Quad can play all of these functions.

Moreover, the Biden administration goes beyond abstract collaboration and is showing a stance of wanting to produce results in terms of concrete cooperation. In fact, the policy areas that the three working groups established in the Quad this time (vaccine, critical and emerging technologies, and climate change) coincide with the Biden administration’s top priority areas. I think the Biden administration might not only consider the Quad as a strategic means against China but also assigns it political and diplomatic significance as a platform that shows how democratic countries can contribute to regional development and prosperity if they work together.

——What about Australia?

Satake: In 2007, when Prime Minister Abe Shinzo (the first administration) proposed the Quad, there were also high-level talks between the four countries. After that, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd signaled that they would not participate, and the project was temporarily “put on hold.” The administration changed in Japan as well and Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo did not show much interest in the Quad. The US and India were also timid due to consideration of China and domestic circumstances, which also forms part of the background of Australia’s decision not to take part. In

short, at that point in time, the idea of counterbalancing China had not permeated Japan, the US, and Australia to the extent that they wanted to involve India.

Quite ironically, right after the Quad faltered, China's attitude toughened. For example, Chinese public vessels started violating Japanese territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands and the South China Sea became more militarized. Chinese cyberattacks and growing Chinese interference over domestic key infrastructure and domestic politics also became a problem in Australia. It was in this context that Foreign Minister Kono Taro gained suprapartisan support when he reiterated the Quad proposal in 2017, with people in Australia voicing great expectations for it as a framework that holds the key to maintaining a regional balance of power. Prime Minister Scott Morrison who took part in the Quad meeting in March 2021 praised the Quad, saying "It's seriously a big deal." He called it the "most significant development for Australian security and sovereignty since ANZUS."

Moreover, Australia sees the Quad as an important means to bind the US to the Indo-Pacific region. The Biden administration is showing a stance of valuing its allies, but the future remains opaque. The current Morrison administration is considering the Quad from a perspective of how much a balance of power that is beneficial to Australia can be maintained with the help of Japan, the US, and India as well as of how much they can coexist with China on that basis.

——Australia also values its relationship with India.

Satake: The relationship between Australia and India has been gradually strengthened until now. That development has been clear in the last few years. In 2018, the "India Economic Strategy" was announced by a former Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, indicating a policy of strengthening comprehensive cooperation with India, including economic and human exchange dimensions. Especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been growing expectations that India will become a partner for diversifying international trade and supply chains as a way to break free from economic overdependence on China. This strengthening of relations with India is part of the high hopes that Australia pin on the Quad.

Ito: There is serious debate in India about economic security and how to get out of supply chains that are dependent on China. This should have become an important issue for the medium to long term, but since April 2021, the explosive rise in infections due to the "second wave" of COVID-19 inside the country, India has had no choice but to receive medical supplies also from China via Hong Kong. Although it might want to break free from China-dependent supply chains, reality has shown that it's not so easy.

Satake: Australia is also advancing initiatives other than the Quad to create a Japan-Australia-India framework and diversify supply chains with the help of ASEAN. Here, the Indian market is key and negotiations are ongoing to sign an FTA between Australia and India, but we don't know how that will turn out. Whether or not economic relations between Australia and India develop will become a key from here on.

The realistic threat that India faces from China

—Where does this figure in India's foreign relations strategy?

Itō: To India, the Quad has two dimensions. First, it is a steppingstone to become a global player. The direction of the Modi administration is more evident than any of the previous administrations. They are of the view that they absolutely must meet the expectation of playing a part in the formation of a regional order on the big stage of the Indo-Pacific in order to go beyond being a regional great power in South Asia and become a “global great power.”

Secondly, they intend to use it as leverage against China, which is their biggest security threat. Unlike Japan, the US, and Australia, India shares a land border with China, so they perceive it as a realistic threat. The turning point was the Dokram crisis in 2017. Dokram is a border territory between Bhutan and China, and when China built a road in Bhutanese territory (China claimed it belongs to China), the Indian Army crossed the border to prevent this, which resulted in two months of Indian and Chinese troops staring each other down. Since then, India has leaned greatly to the Quad. Moreover, since the armed clash between India in China in the Galwan Valley, which is near the Line of Actual Control in the Ladakh and Tibet regions, in June 2020, the confrontation between the two has become more permanent and India has approached the Quad more fervently. They want to contain China politically and diplomatically.

—Is India intending to create some kind of encirclement around China?

Itō: Not quite. They are increasingly considering China a threat, but at the same time, they really don't want to spark confrontation unnecessarily. This is primarily because they will basically have to fight on their own in an emergency situation. Thus, they must be more careful. To the current Modi administration, the Quad is thought of mainly as one of several cards that can be played against China. For example, the Indian government didn't announce its participation in the most recent Quad meeting until the last minute. This was because it was negotiating with China about ending the military confrontation along the border and was watching the Chinese reaction. Second, although China is a security threat to India, it is also a valuable partner with common interests as a “developing country” with regard to various aspects of the world economic system, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Bank.

I think this concern of not wanting to become too openly anti-Chinese is also held by Japan, the US, and Australia. The Joint Statement of the Quad meeting does not touch at all on the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region or the Hong Kong human rights issues. The fact that it also does not mention the China Coast Guard (CCG) Law clearly is out of consideration for India. It seems that the conditions were set to make it easy for India to join the Quad.

Satake: Compared to India and Japan, Australia's view on the Chinese threat is more ideological. Some of the reasons why Australia has become more hardline on China in recent years is the uncomfortable feeling they have with China as it touts “Xi Jinping Thought,” suspicions of Chinese

“meddling” in Australian domestic politics, and the human rights issues in Hong Kong and of the Uyghur.

To begin with, China was Australia’s biggest security threat in the first half of the Cold War period. They had a kind of compulsive idea that if especially Southeast Asia became communist, the threat would eventually spread to Australia. This worry was assuaged when the US and China reconciled, but as China’s challenge against the US-led order has become more vivid, it appears that Australian fears of and discomfort with China have reemerged.

Ito: In the background to India’s “reservations” about the Quad, or its difference in enthusiasm compared to Japan, the US, and Australia, there is Indian diplomacy, which has a long-standing tradition of “strategic autonomy,” in addition to the real military threat of China. If they lean too much toward the Quad, they worry that they will be subsumed under the US-led framework and lose Indian strategic autonomy, and this is something shared by ruling and opposition parties.

However, the desire for strategic autonomy creates a sort of dilemma for India. India tries to gain the upper hand in negotiations with China by hinting that they are approaching the Quad, but China might realize that the approach is not really serious. It is not easy for India to extract itself from this dilemma between strategic autonomy and China strategy.

——What are some possible concrete initiatives?

Mori: I think that the Biden administration is not just hoping for the democratic countries to stand side by side but wants to see concrete outcomes. They “started by doing what they can” by organizing the Quad meeting and then I think the next step is the three working groups on vaccine, critical and emerging technologies, and climate change. I expect they are planning to hold another in-person summit meeting this year and are coming up with concrete statements and future work plans for the working groups in preparation of that. Vaccine cooperation and similar areas produce outcomes that are very visible, but since the COVID-19 pandemic worsened so rapidly in India, the initial plans might have to be adjusted or revised.

As regards critical and emerging technologies, it seems that they will be starting discussions about cooperation on and monitoring of rules for technology use, technical standards, and telecommunications as well as supply chains for key technologies. With regard to climate change, they are looking into stricter implementation of the Paris Agreement and climate change-related financial cooperation.

Ito: The policy areas that the three working groups are working with are not difficult for India to agree with. In particular, for the Modi administration, which launched its vaccine diplomacy in mid-January, vaccine cooperation is something that they must consider a good opportunity. However, because of the rapid surge in domestic infections, India can’t act at the moment. Another concern is that when India asked the world for medical provisions and vaccine support in late April, the responses from Japan, the US, and Australia seemed a bit slower than those of Europe, China, and

Russia. Inside India, there are even those questioning the point of the Quad meeting agreement and the significance of the Quad itself.

Let's not overestimate the Quad

—What are the prospects for the Quad in Japanese diplomacy in the Indo - Pacific?

Mori: As I said earlier, the Quad is not the only means to promote regional diplomacy for Japan, the US, Australia, or India. The Quad doesn't cover all areas of cooperation. I'm sure the four countries will develop their own diplomacy and get involved in countries in the region through a variety of bilateral, mini-lateral, and multilateral frameworks. Actually, if you try to imbue the Quad with prospects that are too long-term, it will rather hurt its short- to mid-term goals. As such, I think it's more practical to focus on the initiatives happening now.

Speaking of which, if you ask me if the Quad deals with any area of cooperation uniquely or exclusively, then I might say it's possible there is none. The vaccine case was supposed to realize Japan-US-Australia-India cooperation that is mutually complementary by utilizing American technology, Japanese and American funds, Australian transportation capacity, and Indian manufacturing capacities, but the COVID-19 situation in India has made this uncertain. Personally, I want to see what outcomes or processes will result from the four countries' cooperation in formulating technical standards and organizing telecommunications through the critical and emerging technologies working group.

—But there are indications of the Quad institutionalization and expansion as well...

Mori: I don't think we can go as far as to call it institutionalization at the moment, but the high level meetings seem likely to become regular. I think the door is open for those countries that wish to work together with the Quad, but I doubt they will increase the number of members in the near future, so it's more realistic they will do things as just four countries. More members will mean that more time is required to build consensus and that interests among the members become more complex, which makes it difficult to efficiently produce concrete results. I think the priority is to cooperate in areas where the four countries can agree. My understanding is that the four countries see the Quad as a forum for gradually advancing functional cooperation without rushing into institutionalization.

—What about the security side of things?

Satake: If we accept that the aim of the so-called "Quad plus" is military cooperation with China in mind, then I think it's unlikely that Asian countries will participate, although the UK and France might. Professor Mori just mentioned how difficult an Asian NATO would be. This is also evident from how the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in the Cold War period was disbanded before becoming a collective defense organization when no consensus was possible among the members.

A mini-lateral framework like the Quad differs from a formal alliance in that it is not very institutionalized and that it is a small-scale ad hoc partnership. This is precisely why it has the positive aspect of being able to respond flexibly to individual challenges in accordance with the circumstances at the time and regional characteristics. If the Quad institutionalizes prematurely or hurries to get new members, it risks losing cohesion and disintegrate. I think it's much more realistic to develop functional cooperation and cultivate shared perceptions among the regional countries through multi-layered promotion of mini-lateral partnerships between Japan, the US, and Australia; Japan, Australia, and India; Japan, the US, and South Korea, and so forth.

Mori: As I mentioned earlier, the Quad is only one of many cooperative means that Japan, the US, Australia, and India possess, so I don't think we should exaggerate and see the Quad as something that will determine the future of the Indo-Pacific region. The Biden administration wants to show China the unity of democratic allies and partner countries in Asia and Europe, thereby creating a advantageous position in its diplomacy vis-à-vis China, and that's why the US sounded the Quad fanfare before and after the Quad meeting. However, as Dr. Satake said, we mustn't overlook the fact that the Quad works best as functional and gradual cooperation.

Moreover, there are already solid bilateral and trilateral cooperation infrastructures between Japan and the US and among Japan, the US, and Australia, and each of Japan, the US, and Australia already conduct bilateral cooperation with India. The Quad is a way to loosely deepen and expand cooperation among the four countries on existing accomplishments. Depending on your perspective, you could claim it's superfluous or supplementary, but the reality is that the Quad stands atop that bilateral and trilateral cooperation. A key challenge is whether they will be able to link the accumulation of trust that comes from that to an expansion and deepening of cooperation among the four countries in security and various other areas by pooling resources for effective investments.

Ito: I feel that there has been a recent tendency of overestimating the Quad in Japan. For India, the Quad is just one of several cooperation frameworks that India belongs to, also including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa). In other words, we really need to recognize that to India, the Quad is just one of several cards that they can play against China.

Moreover, although it isn't "the Quad plus," it's important to observe how regional players view the Quad. Like India, Indonesia is a potential "swing state" among the democratic countries of the Indo-Pacific region. There are ongoing discussions in Japan about how to involve Indonesia, as a key member of the ASEAN, in the cooperation framework, but as soon as they see an open emphasis on military cooperation or are forced to choose "the US or China," Indonesia is likely to resist participation. It's important for the four countries to stand united—although that alone is unlikely to be enough—but they also need to pay attention to neighboring countries.

Satake: I think political and diplomatic principles about containing China through collaboration with democratic countries outside of military affairs will continue to exist. However, it's not the Quad

but G7 or the D10 concept, with India, South Korea, and Australia added, that will stand at the center of that. I'm repeating myself, but the essence of the Quad is military cooperation after all, which is why I think it's important to see it is no more than a "means" to realize FOIP, also for the long-term development of the Quad.

Mori: It's true that when it comes to military and security aspects, we do have examples like the French Navy taking part in joint training with Japan, the US, Australia, and India in April 2021. I agree that we shouldn't overestimate the Quad. However, as everyone has said in this discussion, it has a potential for functionality, progressiveness, flexibility, and mobilizing resources, so it can yield a variety of outcomes depending on how it's used, so we also shouldn't underestimate it either. In short, I think the potential of the Quad changes depending on whether or not the four countries are able to effectively consider its possibilities and limitations with composure.



In April 2021, Japan, the United States, Australia, and France held a multi-lateral training event in the East China Sea west of Kyushu, Japan.

Source: Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force <https://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/sf/english/news/05/0514.html>

In this sense, it is not impossible that the Quad could play a role in providing regional public goods broadly speaking, and not just restricted to military and security—with vaccine promotion and infrastructure development being likely areas. If it provides infrastructure for cooperation that benefits countries in the region in functional areas, then these countries may be induced to engage in multilateral collaboration in functional cooperation frameworks other than the Quad. The mid- to long-term strategic functions of the Quad should be seen as lying in its ability to generate that kind of cohesive power, and I think exercising this kind of cohesive power is exactly what can promote a free and open Indo - Pacific order based on rules.

Moderated by Kominami Yuki

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