

Assessing the Effectiveness of Quad in Maritime Containment of China in the Indo-Pacific Region

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Abstract



The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) comprises of likeminded countries India, Australia, US and Japan. It is a significant player in the Indo-Pacific region amidst a growing Chinese influence. This research paper assesses the effectiveness of Quad in the maritime containment of China. The paper also circulates around individual national interests that may hinder the effectiveness of Quad while also underscoring its limitations. The research was conducted using a qualitative research method. Secondary sources such as journal articles, news, and official joint statements by the alliance were consulted to formulate this paper. The alliance is subjugated to the potential impact on the future of the Indo-Pacific region. Lastly, its effectiveness is quite uncertain towards a counterbalancing China and its significant implications for regional security and freedom of navigation. In terms of future prospects, the maritime security and its threats will keep on changing with evolving time.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific, China, Quad, Alliance, Counterbalancing

Introduction

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) is an informal alliance in the Indo-Pacific region consisting of the United States, India, Australia, and Japan to deter and contain the rising assertiveness of China. The like-minded states within the alliance aim to address maritime security, infrastructure development, the COVID-19 pandemic, critical technologies, climate change challenges, and deterrence against a rising China. The alliance came into existence in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean. Consequently, the Quad focuses on a free and open Indo-Pacific, where freedom of navigation is essential, as it is the third of the world's trade route. The alliance has no formal headquarters, organization, or security commitments, and all members are free to participate in other coalitions.

China is a country that has occupied a central position in the global supply chain. Any form of disruption in the supply chain poses a threat to economic security in an interdependent world. To build a prosperous and peaceful region, China is evident to be a centre of it. The economies of the region tend to depend on China-centred supply chains while being deeply integrated. The Quad strategies seek to prevent Beijing from expanding in the Indo-Pacific region, for example invading Taiwan or gray-zone operations in the South China Sea.

Goals of QUAD

- a) Ensuring Rule of Law
- b) Freedom of Navigation in the Indo-Pacific Region
- c) Peaceful Resolutions to Disputes.
- d) Guarantee Democratic Values
- e) Maintain Territorial Integrity
- f) Countries are not coerced.
- g) Coordinate policy reaffirmations

The strengths of Quad include military and economic power, technological advancements, natural resources, market strength, diplomatic networks, and a system of accountabilities. It sees ASEAN and other bilateral agreements as insufficient to deal with the growing influence of China. Analysts compare Quad with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and call it as 'Asian NATO'. United States Naval Admiral Philip Davidson called Quad as 'Diamond of Democracies'.

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QUAD meeting 2023

According to a joint statement by the Quad members, the states are steadfast to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific region. The countries support the rule of law, principles of freedom, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Moreover, looks upon peaceful settlements of disputes. On May 2023, Quad Partners released a vision statement, which is one of its kinds for the future.

Recently, in December 2023, the US hosted representatives from Australia, Japan, and India in Hawaii for the Quad Counterterrorism Working Group meeting (Statement 2023). The primary focus of containing China and integrating counterterrorism efforts into this agenda may require careful calculations and balancing of priorities. There could be an escalation of tensions with China as it is crucial to ensure transparency and avoid fuelling of an arms race along with suspicions of Quad's motives.

The concept of the Indo-Pacific was first introduced by former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007 during a visit to India. The region is considered a mental map carved out of imagination with a prime focus on containing the rise of China.

Research Objective

The objective of the study is to analyze the effectiveness of Quad for deterring China in the Indo-Pacific region. To consider how Quad's actions can impact the regional dynamics and potentially challenge China's dominance. To critically evaluate how internal matters of the Quad countries can lead to inefficiencies in effectiveness. Lastly, the purpose is to examine China's response to its containment in the Indo-Pacific region by Quad members.

Significance of the study

The significance of the study is essential since the region is considered one of the most crucial trade route areas and produces more than 60% of the global GDP. The region comprises several large economies like China, India, Japan, and Indonesia. Therefore, USA and allies must curb the growing influence of China in the region to ensure US hegemonic identity worldwide. The research provides a nuanced perspective on Quad and advocates for peaceful solutions and regional cooperation between major powers. It highlights the understanding of one of the most pressing security challenges of the 21st century. The study can offer insights and potential consequences that can promote regional stability and pave the way for a prosperous region.

Research Questions

Question 01: How does QUAD'S maritime cooperation impact regional security dynamics and the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific?

Question 02: What are the internal challenges and differing national interests within QUAD that could limit its effectiveness in containment of China?

Theoretical Framework

In support of the argument, the balance of power theory can be applied here. Quad is viewed as a manifestation of the principle of balance of power. The freedom of navigation, operations, and maritime joint exercises can potentially deter China in the Indo-Pacific creating a balance. It can pose a more balanced status quo region for deterring China. The presence of the Quad can create a more multi-polar Indo-Pacific order and reduce China's dominance while allowing smaller states to manage regional security issues. Individually, the Quad members may not match China's power but collectively they present a more formidable challenge.

However, the theory consists of its own limitations. It can be reductionist focusing solely on power dynamics and overlooking other factors such as ideology, culture etc. It can be cynical in assuming that states are always self-centred or selfish with a desire to dominate. Moreover, the theory can be difficult to apply in practice as power is a contested phenomenon and a multifaceted concept that is not easily measured or compared. The Quad is more encouraged to use a soft balancing strategy against China's hegemony. Additionally, (Rafique 2021) Quad will be based primarily on internal balancing and allowing each of the nations to emerge in its respective Asian corners.

Moreover, the potential for Quad's actions could be backfired and result in inadvertently fuelling an arms race along with exacerbating regional tensions instead of maintaining a balance of power.

Literature Review

The US views Quad as a means to stop the growing influence of China. During the pandemic of COVID-19, 1 billion vaccines were distributed among countries of the region by the alliance. The

vaccine innovation was by the US, financed by Japan, manufactured by China and distribution capabilities were hosted by Australia. However, two different types of literature are available where one stresses U.S. hegemony whereas the other stresses Chinese containment. By a central concept, primarily the focus lies on the containment approach.

(Shah 2020) stresses his stance on a China-centric strategy of the US policies. He posed the notion that US objectives of foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific largely circle Chinese containment. The country allies with states that are like-minded in their approach towards the objective. Moreover, Indian and Japanese tilt towards trade and economic development through China may be a hurdle for the US vision. Currently, the states are politically motivated and may not be realistic since no conventional or aggressive approach by the Quad has been experienced yet. On the contrary, China is quite optimistic and does not see the alliance as a barrier to its economic growth and progress.

(Atanassova-Cornelis 2020) discusses the nature of U.S. foreign policy. She concentrated on the political and military architecture in the region which mostly involves forging maritime alliances. This helps to understand the US regional ambitions through the modernization of its foreign policy and reshaping allies according to nature.

China's diplomatic outreach in the Indo-Pacific region is viewed as a part of its ambition to emerge as a global regional power (Colombage 2019). Japan and Australia reached an agreement to jointly implement the Indo-Pacific strategy (IPS) while enhancing defence cooperation with the US and India. The four states have different objectives on IPS which has resulted in slow progress on it.

The Quad has the potential to deter China but the reality is that it is not straightforward. In a comparative analysis between the US and China: The US spent approximately \$778 billion on defence in 2020 whilst China spent \$252 billion. The US has been involved in more than 100 foreign military interventions since 1947 while China has not fought a single war since 1979; still, the former's performance was considered as a failure.

China as a rising power can easily be perceived as a threat to its neighbours especially in the case of India since the former shares borders with the latter. Consequently, this is a prime reason why the regional states opt for a balancing approach in the region (Rafique, 2021).

Alfred Thayer Mahan was a renowned American naval strategist that advocated for a strong navy to ensure security and prosperity. Assessing the effectiveness through the lens of Mahan, combined naval might of the Quad can deter China from undertaking aggressive actions in disputed Indo-Pacific region.

Research Methodology

Reference to secondary data has been referred to within the research paper. This includes different newspapers, documentaries, political magazines, and articles on Quad as well as research papers taken from Google search engine. The method of qualitative analysis has been stressed in this paper. Local and international news articles and press releases were consulted to understand the effectiveness of Quad and its capability to deter China in the Indo-Pacific. Joint statements of official websites and documents have also been consulted for this research paper. Documentaries were watched to understand Quad on a deeper level. However, the research paper excludes quantitative data and primary sources such as interviews with officials or experts.

Analysis

The effectiveness of Quad in order to contain China in the Indo-Pacific has been divided into two categories of assessment. These are as follows:

QUAD; Regional Security Dynamics of Indo Pacific Region

The Quad demonstrates shared interests and to advocate for a free and open Indo-Pacific region. The four members are best equipped militarily and geographically to assume leadership for deterring China. The four members aim to counter an expanding China by 2030 using collective hard-power tactics.

China in the contemporary era can conventionally reach targets to the Second Island Chain and Guam which has brought all current US regional bases under immediate threat. Australian and Japanese Foreign Ministers, Indian External Affairs Ministers, and the US Secretary of State in 2020, convened a meeting to discuss joint exercises in the South China Sea. The security focus of countries includes Malabar naval exercises and the Indo-Pacific partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness. China has been accused of developing a series of ports dubbing a string of perils that has encircled

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India militarily and for the protection of Beijing's shipping lines. China has also built artificial islands that the US claims to be heavily militarized.

Similarly, China is in a decade-long dispute with Japan over claiming the Senkaku Islands that comprises energy and fishing resources within the waters. Additionally, the claim of territory of Taiwan is a major concern in the Indo-Pacific. China claims the island as a renegade province and never rules out the motive of using conventional force in order to exert its control.

QUAD; Internal Challenges and Differing National Interests

All four countries aim to work together against an expanding China. However, this idealistic goal is usually under immense complications since all countries have their underlying vested interests on an individualistic level.

- **United States:** The US has a vast range of global priorities and changing of administrations can impact the effectiveness of Quad. An administration that may focus on a more inward-inclined system would be less interested in multilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Consequentially, the US focuses more on a regional hegemony ideology which may not always keep Quad at the forefront and this may have an impact on the progress of Quad.
- **Japan:** Japan is a country that relies heavily on the United States for security which makes it hesitant to take actions that could jeopardize the bilateral relation. The dependence element may constrain Quad's willingness to counter China beyond the Indo-Pacific realm. Tokyo's defense centres on its Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF).
- **India:** India is a central country between two border-conflicted nations; China and Pakistan. The reason is to ensure a balancing approach along with its strategic partnership with Russia and avoid confrontation with China. Additionally, the current government of India, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP; Hindu nationalist) has been cautious in antagonizing China which could limit the effectiveness of Quad. New Delhi largely invests in its army to defend India's northern borders.
- **Australia:** Australia has significant economic ties with China which could potentially create tension between security and economic interests.

Lastly, Quad has the military capability to choke off China at Sea but restrains since China is the largest trading partner with all four members of Quad and this gives Beijing the edge to flex its economic muscles.

The interests and views of the four states are not identical as aforementioned and may change.

China's Response to QUAD's efforts

The rise of China has been most profound to the geopolitical landscape of the 21st century. Beijing criticizes the US policies and terms it as a 'cold war mentality'. The term was used by Chinese Foreign Minister Spokesperson Wang Wenbin in a regular press conference. China sees Quad meetings as a target of a third party and not an understanding or cooperation gathering. It is quite likely that Quad's capabilities are seen as a negative hooligan for China as in Beijing's eyes, Quad is a part of the broader and political challenge in contrast to a world with more open, liberal, and democratic societies. President of China Xi Jinping has openly criticized US-led Western countries for seeking to encircle, contain, and suppress China. Beijing understands that the Quad shares a deep concern over the growing role of China.

(Colombage 2019) states that China with time has become the second-largest economy of the world. Scholars argued that Beijing has used the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a strategic tool to expand geo-political and geo-economic influence in the Indo-Pacific.

China's tone towards Quad shifted to a harsher criticism since it believed that the former interferes with internal matters of the latter, especially in the case of Taiwan. Recently, in November 2023, Chinese President Xi Jinping arrived in the US ahead of the Summit where China talked about its 'red lines' (Taiwan). The President of the PRC stressed that 'Taiwan is the biggest yet most dangerous matter.' China claims that it has no prospects of military action in Taiwan for the upcoming years but reiterates, that conditions may arise that would create chances of use of force since it is against the independence of Taiwan (which the US supports). China aims at reunification with the Chinese-claimed territory of Taiwan. Chinese Foreign Ministry highlighted Xi's stance to Biden that, "the US should stop arming Taiwan and should support the reunification since it is unstoppable."

Overall, China's response to the Quad is quite complex and multifaceted. The ability to counter China's counterstrategies would require strong regional partnerships.

China now has successfully integrated its economy in balancing military strategies in the Indo-Pacific region (Dr. Sajid Mehmood Shahzad, 2022). The policies are more inclined towards soft power bilateralism and multilateralism. In terms of economic interdependence, Australia, India, and Japan are more inclined towards China to meet their trade and industrial demands.

As to China's growing economy and military might the states may acquire a hedging strategy and this may weaken the cooperation and unity among them. China as a country is continuing to develop into a large non-democratic entity that may shift the U.S. hegemony in the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), composed of Japan, the US, Australia, and India, has emerged as a key player in the Indo-Pacific region with the potential to deter and contain China. While Quad has the ambitions and strength of combined naval power, joint exercises, and diplomatic pressure it still faces internal divergences, lack of a formal structure, and economic dependence on China. The future of Quad remains uncertain as with time, new threats are emerging. The effectiveness and success of Quad will significantly impact the Indo-Pacific region and its ability for maritime containment of China. It can contribute to a more stable, rule-based order and benefit smaller nations while ensuring freedom of navigation.

However, failure to overcome internal challenges can develop a coherent strategy that could encourage China and undermine regional stability. The effectiveness of Quad is a complex issue with no easy answers and ongoing research is essential to fully understand the impact of the Indo-Pacific region. The Quad and China relations may be contentious in the foreseeable future but should not translate into a zero-sum relationship as the world has space for more superpowers. Both countries should understand the sensitivity at the front and find a middle way to minimize risks of escalation. The Quad initiative will eventually evolve into a NATO-esque treaty organization but this is a premature speculation (Soumyodeep Deb 2021).

Limitations

The paper is limited to relying only on secondary data sources which can have its biases and limitations. It has a short-term scope with uncertainty and time constraints for assessing long-term research. The theory might not fully capture regional interactions, history, and cultural aspects influencing Quad's effectiveness.

Implications

The Quad could potentially deter a rising China in the region whilst increasing collaboration and enhancing the security network with the regional actors. Quad's effectiveness in ensuring freedom of navigation could uphold and strengthen existing legal frameworks and norms. On the contrary, it may trigger increased competition between the major powers and could have a negative impact on the vulnerable nations by impacting their autonomy and security.

Recommendations

The author has proposed a few recommendations that include the Quad countries to remain flexible and responsive to evolving security threats and technological advancements in the Indo-Pacific region. As an informal alliance, the countries may seek to communicate objectives and activities clearly to the public for international support. Aim to invest more in diplomacy and peaceful resolutions to maritime disputes against a rising China under International Law. Finally, address efficiently the national priorities through mutual understanding and respect for an effective outcome.

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