

# The Revival of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue: Causes and Characteristics

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## Abstract

The content of this paper is mainly divided into the following four parts: First, the development of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is sorted out; Secondly, explore the reasons for the resumption of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue; Third, analyze the characteristics of the new Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. Finally, this paper believes that the United States, Japan, India and Australia have formed a Quadrilateral Security Dialogue mechanism based on their respective interests, but the resumption of this mechanism is not only from the continuous cooperation of the four countries, but also from the internal contradictions of the international system. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue mechanism is deepening and the cooperation issues are also expanding. The containment and impact of Quad on China cannot be ignored.

**Keywords:** Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, the United States, Japan, India, Australia, Indo-Pacific

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## 1. Introduction

The United States, Japan, India and Australia formally launched the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) mechanism in 2007, but the mechanism was put to rest after less than a year. In 2017, the four countries renewed their interest in further deepening cooperation and continued to promote the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue to a higher standard in the past four years, evolving into today's Quad 2.0. After ten years, what causes this change? What are the characteristics of the new "Quadrilateral Security Dialogue"? These are the questions to be answered in this paper.

## 2. The Development of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue Mechanism

### 2.1 The Origin of the Quadrilateral Security

### Dialogue

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD/Quad) is an informal strategic dialogue between the United States, Japan, India and Australia. The United States, Japan, India and Australia have maintained the development of the mechanism through high-level dialogue, foreign ministers, defense ministers and summit dialogue. In 2004, during the humanitarian relief operations after the Indian Ocean tsunami, the United States, Japan, India and Australia formed a preliminary trend of dialogue on security issues.<sup>1</sup> At that time, the United States, Japan, Australia and India established the Tsunami Core Group<sup>2</sup>, which was intended to promote the coordination of disaster relief activities and address the direct challenges posed by the tsunami, but did not aim at establishing a

permanent dialogue mechanism. This cooperation became the beginning of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and then Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso proposed in 2006, that they should cooperate with countries with the same basic universal values as Japan, such as respect for freedom, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, market economy, and establish an Arc of Freedom and Prosperity. In May 2007, during the ASEAN Regional Forum, officials from the United States, Japan, India and Australia held the first dialogue in Manila, and discussed the security cooperation plan of the Quartet. On August 22, when Prime Minister Abe Shinzo visited India and delivered a speech to the Indian Parliament, he “recommended” Japan’s “Asian Freedom Arc” plan to India.<sup>3</sup> He proposed to establish a “quartet relationship” between Japan, Australia, India and the United States. Abe hopes to promote the implementation and development of the “Asian Freedom Arc” plan through the cooperation of the United States, Japan, India and Australia. Abe’s proposal not only received the support of the leaders of the United States, India and Australia, but also intersected with the later “Asia-Pacific rebalancing” and “Indo-Pacific” ideas of the United States. In September 2007, the United States, India, Japan, Australia and other countries held a joint naval exercise in the Bay of Bengal. Security cooperation among the four countries began to be established through dialogue and joint military exercises.

The smooth progress of the four countries’ security dialogue and cooperation stems from both the four countries’ demands for expanding their strategic interests and their fear of China’s expansion of influence in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue mechanism was not entirely created in response to the rise of China, but under the impetus of the United States, this factor has become the main motivation for the formation of the mechanism.

However, in 2008, Australia expressed concern about the Quartet dialogue and its impact on China-Australia relations and withdrew from “dialogue of this nature”.<sup>4</sup> India also worried that the Quartet might have an impact on its foreign policy and lost its enthusiasm for the mechanism. India and Australia wavered in the establishment and continuation of this mechanism, which eventually led to the collapse of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

mechanism that began in 2007.

## *2.2 The Revival of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue*

In 2012, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe put forward the idea of “a drill for democracy and security in Asia”. It also said that it would help “protect the maritime commons extending from the Indian Ocean to the Western Pacific”. In 2016, Abe reiterated this view when meeting with Prime Minister Modi of India. He said that “a free and open Indo-Pacific” is “vital to the prosperity of the whole region”. In October 2017, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono, in an interview with the *Nikkei Asia Review*, first publicly proposed to restart the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.

In November 2017, the then US President Trump, Indian Prime Minister Modi, Japanese Prime Minister Abe and Australian Prime Minister Turnbull participated in the East Asia Summit held in Manila, and met separately during this period to discuss topics related to the security of the Indo-Pacific region. During the period, diplomats from the United States, Japan, India and Australia held direct consultations and discussed maritime security, rules-based Asian order, compliance with international law, freedom of navigation and overflight in international waters, and terrorist threats. This consultation not only restarted the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, but also set the direction for the next four countries’ cooperation.

In December 2017, Trump mentioned the importance of cooperation between the United States, Japan, India and Australia in the first National Security Strategy issued by his government. In the same year, the white paper on Australia’s foreign policy reaffirmed Australia’s firm commitment to conducting trilateral dialogue with the United States, India and Japan respectively.<sup>5</sup> Since then, India has also expressed its affirmation of restarting this mechanism. In June 2018, officials from the United States, Japan, India and Australia again held consultations in Singapore to discuss issues related to common interests in the Indo-Pacific region, and reaffirmed the commitment of all parties to promote “free and open Indo-Pacific” and maintain “rule-based order”. On November 15, during the East Asia Summit, diplomats from the four countries held the third dialogue on the same theme. Since then, the four countries have formed a regular consultation

mechanism of meeting senior officials twice a year.

In September 2019, the United States, Japan, India and Australia held their first foreign ministerial meeting during the United Nations General Assembly, which greatly enhanced the formality of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue mechanism. Subsequently, the four countries established a “2+2” dialogue mechanism between foreign ministers and defense ministers. At the same time, bilateral defense cooperation within the four countries has also made great progress. Even though international exchanges are hampered by the COVID-19, the momentum of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue continues unabated.

By 2021, the four countries had jointly held two “Malabar” joint naval exercises, which even covered the South China Sea. The leaders of the four countries held online and offline summits, and the bilateral cooperation between members of the four countries has deepened. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue has achieved the transformation from Quad 1.0 to Quad 2.0.

### **3. Reasons for the Rapid Resumption and Advancement of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue**

#### *3.1 The Cooperation Between the Four Countries Has Not Been Interrupted*

The resumption of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue stems from the continuous dialogue spanning a decade. Since the collapse of Quad 1.0 in 2008, members of the four countries have steadily strengthened contacts in the field of security and defense. There are regular bilateral or trilateral dialogues and military exercises among the four countries. The trilateral strategic dialogue between the United States, Japan and Australia, the trilateral strategic dialogue between the United States, Japan and India and the trilateral dialogue between Australia, Japan and India have been active over the decade. From 2007 to 2017, Japan and Australia, Japan and India, Australia and India all have held bilateral “2+2” dialogues. In 2015, Japan even participated in the “Malabar” naval exercise between the United States and India. These trilateral or bilateral interactions are not always for the same purpose: The United States seeks to achieve “Asia Pacific rebalancing” to consolidate its influence in Asia, the Pacific and the Indian Ocean; Japan and Australia hope to cope with China’s growing influence by strengthening

cooperation; The dialogue and cooperation between India, Japan and Australia is also intended to cope with China’s growing influence in the region. However, these military and diplomatic exchanges have achieved the effect of maintaining cooperation among the four countries. The maintenance of this cooperation situation provides a continuous platform for the four countries to exchange views, and also makes up for the shortcomings of being too hasty and unprepared when the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue was launched for the first time.

#### *3.2 Four Countries Have Common Interests*

The pursuit of common interests is the key driving force for the resumption of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. The United States and Japan were the first to actively seek to restructure the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. The US move is intended to strengthen the US-India relationship to counter China. India’s economic development speed, population, ideology and geographical location all mean that it must be in a key position in the chess game of the United States to balance China. It has become very important to raise India’s priority in US foreign policy. The relationship between the United States, Japan and Australia has been relatively stable. The key is how to integrate India into the United States’ alliance system. Soliciting India alone will not only arouse the vigilance of China, but also arouse the suspicion of Japan, South Korea, Australia and even India itself. Therefore, the United States is trying to expand the acceptance of the Indo-Pacific concept, create a regional awareness that can meet the needs of India, and bring it into the “circle of friends” of the United States. Let India believe that the United States can support it.<sup>6</sup>

For Japan, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is of high strategic significance. First of all, Japan’s main motivation for promoting the mechanism is that Japan believes that China is challenging the balance of power in East Asia, and it is eager to compete with China. Secondly, Japan also hopes to balance its military dependence on the United States by continuously strengthening security cooperation with neighboring countries. Third, Japan regards China’s normal territorial claims as a serious challenge to Japan and regional security, and the “the Belt and Road” initiative as a way for China to try to control the sea transportation and energy supply routes from Asia to Africa to clamp down on Japan. So,

Japan also want to take advantage of the strategy of uniting India against China. One of the reasons for Japan to promote the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is to unite India to compete with China in regional economic ties, infrastructure construction and connectivity. To this end, Japan and India also put forward the idea of Asia Africa Growth Corridor, trying to make it a substitute for the “the Belt and Road” initiative.

Australia first proposed to withdraw from the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue mechanism in 2008, which became the direct reason for the collapse of the mechanism at that time. Kevin Rudd, the then Australian Prime Minister, did not want to crack down on the Sino-Australian relations that were restarting and heating up in this way. From the perspective of geography and history, China and Australia are far apart from each other, and there are no long-term accumulated ethnic conflicts. In 2014, the China-Australia strategic economic dialogue mechanism was even formally established between China and Australia. Through the mechanism of regular high-level dialogue, communication was strengthened to discuss bilateral, regional and global security and economic issues. However, in 2017, China-Australia relations turned sharply downward. This year, there were reports in Australia that Chinese businessmen made illegal contributions to local politicians, and the activities of a large number of Chinese immigrants and students in Australia also caused local discontent. In 2018, Australia became the first country to prohibit Huawei from participating in its 5G network construction on the grounds of national security.

On the one hand, the huge differences in culture, system, history and concepts make the Australian government unable to believe or stand on the side of China in the face of global competition between China and the United States. Therefore, Australia has chosen to stand with the United States in its strategy towards China. Almost as the Trump government launched a trade war with China, the Australian government also took corresponding actions. On the other hand, Australia had a certain degree of export dependence on China at that time. In 2017, China accounted for nearly 30% of Australia’s exports, most of which were iron ore and coal. Australia hopes to diversify the economic risks brought by this export

dependence, while India’s huge market demand is an excellent channel to transfer the risks of economic dependence.

India’s decision to return to the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is mainly based on the following considerations. First, India believes that China’s active peripheral foreign policy has touched the scope of its traditional foreign exchanges and has created a political encirclement for India. The second is that there were originally complementary economic and trade between China and India. In the process of India’s gradual development, there were overlapping interests and conflicts. The economic ties between India and ASEAN countries are increasingly close, but the economic ties and trade volume between China and ASEAN countries and many Indian Ocean Island countries around India are far greater than that of India, which has squeezed India’s living space in regional economic and trade. Third, the Indian government believes that China’s growing economic interests in Southeast Asia mean that China will strengthen its military presence in the Indian Ocean in order to protect its own economic interests. This military presence, as well as the close relationship between China and Pakistan, may pose a security threat to India from both land and sea. In addition, India and China have their own territorial disputes, and there is a great possibility of military friction between the two sides. The Indian government is eager to strengthen cooperation with regional defense partners to counter China’s military and political influence in South and Southeast Asia. Fourth, while taking domestic economic development as the first priority, India began to expand its diplomatic strategic vision from the core area of the Indian Ocean to the western Pacific. In November 2014, the Modi government officially announced that it would transform the “eastward policy” into the “eastward action policy”, hoping to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and strategic relations with Asia-Pacific countries through continuous bilateral, regional and multilateral contacts, and finally integrate into the Asia-Pacific political and economic order on an equal basis, and play a role in the construction of regional security structure.

The four countries have different purposes to restart the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, but they all have the intention of using each other to

transfer risks, expand markets, confront China and enhance their own influence. This common demand is the internal motivation for the successful revival of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. At present, the basic objectives and cooperation contents of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue have been gradually clarified, including determining “Indo-Pacific” as the geographical scope of cooperation; pay equal attention to security and economy, especially to maintain the freedom of navigation and overflight in the Indo-Pacific region, and strengthen cooperation in regional infrastructure construction. The ultimate goal is to establish a free and open regional order based on rules.

### *3.3 The Internal Contradictory Impetus of the International Political Movement*

The most fundamental driving force for the operation of international politics is the development of productive forces. In the ten years from 2007 to 2017, the productivity of major countries in the world has undergone tremendous changes, which will also have a profound impact on the strength comparison of countries in the world in the future. In 2017, the World in 2050 report of PwC<sup>7</sup>, an international professional service company, ranked the top ten economies in the world before 2050. China ranked first, India ranked second, the United States ranked third, and Japan, Germany and the United Kingdom ranked the last three. At present, the United States is facing challenges to its status as the number one power. Its sense of crisis urges it to intensify its efforts to suppress, encircle and blockade China. India’s optimistic expectation of its rapid economic development has led it to pursue an all-round promotion of its international influence and shape its status as a major country. Compared with Japan and Australia, the United States and India have more reason to take active action and participate in actions that affect international political changes. This can explain why the US-India relationship can rise rapidly in a very short time and promote the resumption of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.

The internal contradictions of the international system are the main driving force for the operation of international politics. The internal contradictions of the international system are mainly manifested in the contradictory movement between the center and the periphery of the international system as a whole. A series of new features have emerged in the internal

contradictions of the modern international system: First of all, there is a real global power center in the world—the United States; Secondly, the center and periphery are affected by globalization, the antagonism is greatly weakened, the possibility of all-out hot war is greatly reduced, and cooperation and follow become the norm; Third, the role of international mechanisms and norms has been strengthened, and the role of ideas has become increasingly prominent. As a result, the internal contradictions of international politics at this time have gradually become functional and regional, and the single logic of confrontation has been increasingly reduced. The deep interdependence of the world economy has led to the evolution of the basic contradictions of the international system from a clear global camp of comprehensive confrontation to regional, functional and competitive coexistence.

The reemergence of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue mechanism is a way for the power center countries to unite with other forces to counter the peripheral countries. Without the support of the United States, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue could not be formed. The reason why the United States wants to unite these countries to form such a mechanism is that, in addition to confronting China in the current situation, it can also form a draw up and containment against India, which may attack the center in the longer future. Indian Foreign Minister Su Jiasheng believes that there are two driving forces behind the increasingly close cooperation among the members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue: the leadership of the United States in global and regional affairs and the rise and “expansion” of China. Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar believes that there are two driving forces behind the increasingly close cooperation of the members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue: the leadership of the United States in global and regional affairs and the rise and “expansion” of China.<sup>8</sup> This is actually one driving force, namely the contradictory movement between the center power and the periphery. The reason why this contradictory movement is manifested as the establishment of a regional mechanism is precisely the characteristics of this contradictory movement in modern times.

## **4. Characteristics of the New Quadrilateral Security Dialogue**

### *4.1 The Intention to Confront China Is Clearer*

From the beginning of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between the United States, Japan, India and Australia in 2007, containment of China's rise has become its theme. In terms of security, the four countries believed that China's refusal to recognize the "legitimacy" of the China-Philippines South China Sea arbitration award undermined the rule-based regional order. China has tried to establish overseas military bases by building ports and industrial parks along the "the Belt and Road", which has brought a huge impact on the regional security structure. To this end, the four countries must cooperate to curb China's influence in the region. In terms of economy, the four countries worry that China will use the "the Belt and Road" as an economic tool to "coerce" other countries to achieve its own strategic and security goals.<sup>9</sup> In the 2017 US National Security Strategy, the prevention of the "the Belt and Road" initiative was even designated as a national security issue.<sup>10</sup> India criticized China on the Maldives issue, and Australia criticized China's assistance to the infrastructure construction of the South Pacific Island countries for the same motives.

#### *4.2 Expanded Scope of Topics*

When the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue resumed in 2017, the main concerns of the four countries were the Korean nuclear issue and the situation in the South China Sea. But so far, the statements of the four countries' regional vision have changed from "a free and open regional order based on the rule of law" to "a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific order". The topics discussed have also expanded from the main focus on regional security issues to "development and connectivity, good governance, regional security, maritime cooperation" and how to deal with relations with ASEAN.<sup>11</sup> The new Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is committed to building a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific order based on rules. The contents of the dialogue have covered many areas such as regional security, economic development, social governance, climate change, public health, global value chain and relations with other regional mechanisms.

#### *4.3 Institutional Construction Tends to Be Stable*

Since the first senior official consultation in 2017, the institutionalization of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue has been accelerating. From 2017 to 2019, the four countries completed five contacts. In June 2018, the

US-Japan-India-Australia consultation was held in Singapore. The four countries reaffirmed their common support for a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region, confirmed their common commitment to maintaining and strengthening rule-based order in the Indo-Pacific region, and agreed to cooperate with the countries and institutions in the region to promote peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region. In November of the same year, senior officials from the four countries met again in Singapore to hold consultations on issues related to the Indian Ocean - Pacific region. In May 2019, senior officials from the United States, India, Japan and Australia met in Bangkok, Thailand, and held consultations on collective efforts to promote a free, open and inclusive India-Pacific region.

In addition to reaffirming their common commitment to maintaining and promoting rule-based order in the region, the four countries also discussed infrastructure investment, regional disaster response, cyber security and maritime security. The COVID-19 not only did not hinder the progress of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, but also brought new areas of cooperation for the four countries. The joint military exercises and summit meetings of the four countries are in full swing, and the coordinated development of vaccine research, public health, global value chain, climate change, emerging technologies and other fields is also strengthening. The "2+2" ministerial dialogue, summit and joint military exercises of the four countries have become the three major institutionalized construction of the new Quadrilateral Security Dialogue mechanism.

#### *4.4 "Quad+" Mode Becomes Possible*

The initial idea of the United States, Japan, India and Australia to launch the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is to build an India-Pacific regional cooperation network. After the resumption of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, senior officials of the four countries have repeatedly expressed their willingness to engage in dialogue and coordination with other countries and institutions in the region. South Korea, Vietnam, the United Kingdom and France also seek to contact the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue mechanism based on their respective interests in the Indo-Pacific region. In May 2019, the United States, Japan, South Korea and Australia held a joint maritime military exercise codenamed "Pacific Pioneer" in the

western Pacific Ocean for the first time. In November, the first specific agreement on South Korea's participation in the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy was officially released, creating conditions for the United States to gradually integrate South Korea into the framework of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.

In March 2018, the US aircraft carrier first docked at Vietnam military port after the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. The warming of US-Vietnam relations and the subtle changes in China-Vietnam relations make the emergence of "Quad+Vietnam" possible. The United Kingdom and France are related countries geographically outside the region but with interests within the region. They also have the possibility of establishing some connection with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue mechanism.<sup>12</sup> On March 20, 2020, the United States, Japan, India and Australia held a teleconference with South Korea, Vietnam and New Zealand on the prevention and control of the COVID-19 at that time, creating the first "Quad+" conference. This type of meeting will inevitably increase in the future.

## 5. Conclusion

From the accidental rise in 2004 to the flash in the pan in 2007, and to the continuous promotion from 2017 to now, the formation of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue mechanism is not only from the common interests of the United States, Japan, India and Australia, but also from the inevitable law of the contradictions of the international political movement. It has a certain impact on the security structure of the region and even the world. However, because the four countries have not reached a comprehensive consensus on cooperation, the future direction of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is still uncertain. The Quartet security dialogue mechanism is still at a relatively low level of loose cooperation. Once they really enter the process of organizational construction, the four countries can become the real large-span military alliance in the Indo-Pacific region. At that time, China may face serious security threats, military siege and economic blockade. This is the worst situation that China can face when the Quartet security dialogue continues to advance. In order to avoid such a situation, China should adopt an active and flexible diplomatic strategy, ease the tension in the surrounding and regional areas, create a good surrounding and international

environment, and accumulate strength in order to extend the time for peaceful development.

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