

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and Reconstruction of Asia-Pacific Order

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Since 2017, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), which is comprised of the United States, Japan, India and Australia, has been fully “resurrected.”¹ The Quad is a revived dialogue platform in order for these four countries to reconcile perceptions, coordinate actions, and enhance cooperation. It also reflects the inherent changes in Asia’s geopolitics which now features the new US construct of the “Indo-Pacific” region. During the revamping of the Asia-Pacific landscape, various multilateral mechanisms like the Quad will coexist. The world will experience continual strategic interactions among these, including both competition and cooperation, and a new regional order will eventually come into being. This paper intends to analyze the Quad’s latest progress, future cooperation priorities and development trends, and on this basis, discuss the trajectory and characteristics of the reconstruction of Asia-Pacific regional order, and evaluate their impact on China’s external environment and the nation’s rise.

Regional Background of the Quad’s Revival

Since the end of World War II, the United States has been an important shaper and leader of Asia-Pacific regional order. During the Cold War, the Asia-Pacific region evolved into a bipolar order dominated by the US-Soviet competition for hegemony, and the US established a system of bilateral

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1 The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is abbreviated as Quad. Many foreign scholars refer to it as Quad 2.0.

alliances with itself as the center. After the Cold War, the status of the US military alliance system in the Asia-Pacific order has been further enhanced, and has evolved from the hub-and-spoke mode during the Cold War to a more multi-faceted fan-shaped pattern, which is based on the US-Japan alliance and features stronger ties with South Korea and Australia. Such alliances not only focus on security cooperation, but also on strengthened economic ties among the allied countries. It also attempts to bring the East Asian region and countries into a closer Asia-Pacific cooperation mechanism. However, ASEAN and China, showing much concern about US dominance in the region, do not support the establishment of an inward-looking regional mechanism. To this end, under the guidance of “open regionalism,” Asia-Pacific cooperation has been driven by multiple parties and is characterized by more “competitive openness.”² Therefore, by the beginning of the 21st century, while the security order in the Asia-Pacific was still dominated by US-led military alliances, the regional economic order has witnessed a trend toward diversification, with the rise of emerging forces such as China and Southeast Asian countries. Moreover, this trend has gradually extended from the economic field to the security arena.

In the second decade of the 21st century, with the significant improvement of China’s overall national strength, a reversal in the power balance between China and Japan, and the narrowing gap between Chinese and US strengths, the US dominance in the Asia-Pacific order has been shaken. In response, the Obama administration implemented the “Asia-Pacific rebalancing” strategy, trying to strengthen its alliances and building partnerships by enhancing US presence in the region. Washington has also invested much in multi-level strategic construction through regional multilateral cooperation mechanisms, to demonstrate to its allies and security

2 For related discussions, see Wu Xinbo, “The Obama Administration and the Asia-Pacific Regional Order,” *World Economics and Politics*, No.8, 2013; Wu Xinbo, “On the Asia-Pacific Change,” *World Economics and Politics*, No.6, 2017; Zhang Yunling, “Asia-Pacific Regional Relations and Mechanisms in Transformation,” *Foreign Affairs Review*, No.3, 2018; Zhong Feiteng and Zhang Jie, “The Flying Geese Security Pattern and the Strategic Choice of China’s Neighborhood Diplomacy,” *World Economics and Politics*, No.8, 2011.

partners the determination and credibility of its security commitment, while pushing back the “expansion” of China’s influence in the region.

After taking office as US President, Donald Trump announced that he would abandon the “Asia-Pacific rebalancing” strategy altogether. He not only immediately withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and emphasized the rebalancing of economic relations to overturn the chronic US trade deficits with Asia-Pacific countries, but also required Japan, South Korea and other allies to share more defense responsibilities and costs. However, the Trump administration has discarded the old mechanisms without building new ones. Its new Asia-Pacific policy has not been announced despite all expectations, while it turns a cold eye to regional cooperation mechanisms such as the East Asia Summit. These practices have greatly eroded the confidence of its allies and partners in US leadership and security commitment in Asia-Pacific affairs, causing great strategic anxiety and uneasiness in these countries.

In stark contrast to the US, China’s overall strength continues to rise. In particular, the economic clout demonstrated by Beijing’s proposal and promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative and establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), as well as the security influence reflected in it safeguarding its rights in the East and South China Seas, have made Japan, Australia and other Asia-Pacific countries worry that, with the absence of US check and balance, they will have to accept a new regional order shaped by coercive Chinese power. Therefore, as the first step, Japan and Australia have attempted to work together to fill the “power vacuum” left by the US and curb the rapid expansion of China’s influence. Then Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull pointed out in the 2017 Shangri-La Dialogue that “Now, in this brave new world we cannot rely on great powers to safeguard our interests. We have to take responsibility for our own security and prosperity while recognizing we are stronger when sharing the burden of collective leadership with trusted partners and friends ... If we are to maintain the dynamism of the region then we must preserve the rules-based structure that has enabled it thus far. This means cooperation not unilateral actions

to seize or create territory or militarize disputed areas.”³ Therefore, while developing their own new regional strategies, Japan and Australia have revived the Quad, trying to keep the United States engaged in the Asia-Pacific region, and bring India in to jointly cope with the rise of China.

India has responded positively to this since the restart of the Quad is in line with its own national interests and strategic needs. In recent years, with the growth of economy, India’s national strength and regional influence have been greatly enhanced, especially after the political strongman Narendra Modi took office, who vowed not only to build a “secure, prosperous and strong new India,” but also to “make the 21st century the century of India.” While taking domestic economic development as its top priority, India has begun to expand its diplomatic strategic vision from the core region of the Indian Ocean to the Western Pacific. In November 2014, the Modi government officially announced the transformation of “Look East” policy into “Act East” policy, hoping to promote, through sustained bilateral, regional and multilateral engagement, economic cooperation, cultural ties and strategic relations with Asia-Pacific countries, and, in the end, to integrate into the political and economic order of the Asia-Pacific region as an equal partner, while playing a role in the construction of the regional security architecture.⁴ The resumption of the Quad shows that the US, Japan and Australia recognize India as a rising Asian power. It also provides one more platform for India to achieve this goal.

In addition, in the past decade, bilateral and multilateral cooperation among the United States, Japan, India and Australia has seen considerable progress. While the existing US-Japan and US-Australia military alliances have been strengthened, bilateral relations between the US and India have developed rapidly. During the period of the “Asia-Pacific rebalancing” strategy, the role of India became more highly valued by the US. Marked by the signing of the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement in 2016, the strategic and

3 “Keynote Address at the 16th IISS Asia Security Summit, Shangri-La Dialogue,” June 3, 2017, <https://www.malcolmturnbull.com.au/media/keynote-address-at-the-16th-iiss-asia-security-summit-shangri-la-dialogue>.

4 Li Li, “India’s Act East Strategy and Indo-Pacific Diplomacy,” *Contemporary International Relations*, No.1, 2018.



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and then Secretary of Defense James Mattis meet with their Indian counterparts, Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj and Minister of Defense Nirmala Sitharaman, in the first US-India “2+2” dialogue in New Delhi, September 6, 2018.

military cooperation between the two countries has developed in great depth.⁵ At the same time, since Shinzo Abe and Modi came to power in Japan and India respectively, India-Japan relations have entered a “honeymoon period.” The two leaders exchanged several visits, and the two countries have established a “special global strategic partnership.” In particular, their move to build an “Asia-Africa Growth Corridor” reflects the similarity between the two countries’ Indo-Pacific strategies and Africa policies, as well as their concerns about China’s influence in the region.⁶ At the trilateral level, the United States, Japan and Australia began a

5 Regarding India’s stance on the Quad mechanism and the US Indo-Pacific strategy, there have been many discussions in China recently. Please refer to Lin Minwang, “The Construction of ‘Indo-Pacific’ and the Strength of Asia’s Geopolitics,” *Foreign Affairs Review*, No.1, 2018; Li Li, “India’s Act East Strategy and Indo-Pacific Diplomacy”; Yang Rui and Wang Shida, “India and Indo-Pacific Strategy: Perception, Participation and Limitation,” *Contemporary International Relations*, No.1, 2018.

6 Regarding the development of bilateral relations between India and Japan, there have been much research in recent years in China, such as Lin Minwang, “India-Japan Relations Enter the ‘Honeymoon Period’?,” *Contemporary World*, No.10, 2017; Lou Chunhao, “The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor Initiative: Connotation, Motivation and Prospects,” *International Studies*, No.1, 2018.

trilateral dialogue in 2005; the US-Japan-India trilateral dialogue was launched in 2011 and officially upgraded to the ministerial level in September 2015; in June 2015, India, Japan and Australia kick started the vice foreign ministerial level trilateral dialogue. The “habits of cooperation” cultivated through bilateral and trilateral mechanisms have facilitated the resumption of the Quad. And the development of the Quad is conducive not only to strengthening coordination of policies and actions among the four, but also to deepening their existing bilateral and trilateral cooperation.

Therefore, it is precisely in response to major changes in the China-US balance of power and the restructuring of the Asia-Pacific order that Japan and Australia have promoted the Quad. Their intention of keeping the United States in the region and bringing in India as a check on China has become the fundamental driving force for the resumption and accelerated cooperation of the Quad.

Progress, Characteristics and Essence of Quad

The earliest conception of the Quad can be traced back to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. At that time, in response to the enormous challenge of post-disaster relief, the United States advocated and promoted coordinated actions with Japan, India and Australia to strengthen cooperation in this field. Subsequently in 2006, Abe, in his first tenure as prime minister, proposed the vision of cooperation among the four countries, echoing his “value diplomacy” and idea of “the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity.” In May 2007, the US, Japan, Australia and India held their first security dialogue during the ASEAN Regional Forum. In September, the four countries, plus Singapore, carried out a joint maritime military exercise in the Bay of Bengal. However, Australia announced its withdrawal from the quadrilateral dialogue soon after Kevin Rudd became Prime Minister. As the domestic political situation in Japan and India also changed, the dialogue subsided.⁷

7 Tan Ming Hui and Nazia Hussain: “Quad 2.0: Facing China’s Belt & Road?” RSIS Commentary, No.33, February 2018.

At that time, the Quad was only an informal strategic dialogue rather than a substantive alliance, but its existence, in addition to meeting the real needs for functional cooperation, also implied the countries' concerns about the rise and growing influence of China. From 2007 to 2017, the importance of both factors has increased significantly, particularly the latter one.⁸

In response to a reversal in the balance of power between China and Japan, soon after returning to office in December 2012, Abe proposed the building of a “Democratic Security Diamond” composed of the United States, Japan, India and Australia. Unfortunately, the Quad was absent of actual utility at that time, as the US-led “Asia-Pacific rebalancing” strategy was in full swing and had incorporated Japan and Australia, as US allies, and India, as a US partner. It was not until the beginning of 2017, when the “Asia-Pacific rebalancing” strategy was abandoned by the Trump administration, and the regional influence of the US declined while that of China rose, that the Quad began to be “resurrected” in earnest. Marked by two consultative meetings attended by the four countries, the Quad gradually embarked on a path of pragmatic cooperation.

The two consultative meetings, attended by director-general level officials from foreign ministries of the US, Japan, Australia and India, were held in November 2017 and June 2018. Convened around the theme of a “free and open Indo-Pacific,” the first quadrilateral meeting addressed seven core themes.⁹ Although separate statements rather than a joint declaration were issued, the four countries reached consensus on the core theme of “common democratic values,” which was regarded as the basis for “cooperation for security and prosperity.”¹⁰ The second meeting

8 Zhang Feng, “The Imagination of ‘Indo-Pacific’: Where from and Where to Go,” *FT Chinese*, June 21, 2018, <http://www.ftchinese.com/story/001078107>.

9 The seven core themes include: the rules-based order in Asia, freedom of navigation and overflight in the maritime commons, respect for international law, enhancing connectivity, maritime security, the North Korean threat and nonproliferation, and terrorism.

10 “Australia-India-Japan-US Consultations on the Indo-Pacific,” US Department of State, November 12, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/11/275464.htm>; “India-Australia-Japan-US Consultations on Indo-Pacific,” Ministry of External Affairs of India, November 12, 2017, http://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29110/IndiaAustraliaJapanUS_Consultations_on_IndoPacific_November_12_2017.

was relatively low-key. According to the statement issued by Japan at its conclusion, the meeting had at least two priorities, namely, supporting ASEAN centrality in the construction of regional mechanisms, and promoting sustainable economic cooperation in the region.¹¹ This shows that the four countries were trying to use the Quad as the core to gradually expand the scope of their “alliance,” with ASEAN as the key target. Therefore, the priority became dispelling ASEAN’s concerns that the Quad would weaken its own central position. At the same time, the Quad would focus on strengthening economic cooperation, which was further echoed during the Indo-Pacific Business Forum at the end of July 2018 by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who announced that the US would adopt a new \$113-million plan to support the development of digital economy, energy and infrastructure. The purpose of strengthening economic cooperation is really motivated by security interests. As Pompeo said, “we remain committed to economic engagement in the Indo-Pacific because of the national security benefits for the American people and our partners. As President Trump’s National Security Strategy states, ‘Economic security is national security’.”¹²

So far, the basic objectives and cooperative content of the Quad have gradually become clear, and include: identifying the “Indo-Pacific” as the geographical scope for cooperation; focusing on both security and economy, particularly safeguarding the freedom of navigation and overflight in the Indo-Pacific, while trying to strengthen cooperation in regional infrastructure development; and establishing as an ultimate goal a rules-based, free and open regional order.¹³

11 “Japan-Australia-India-US Consultations,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, June 7, 2018, https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_002062.html.

12 “Remarks on ‘America’s Indo-Pacific Economic Vision’,” US Department of State, July 30, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/07/284722.htm>.

13 The United States, Japan, India and Australia have already elaborated on various occasions in this regard. After the first quadrilateral consultation meeting in November 2017, the statements issued by the four countries are very useful references. Please refer to “Australia-India-Japan-US Consultations on the Indo-Pacific,” US Department of State; “India-Australia-Japan-US Consultations on Indo-Pacific,” Ministry of External Affairs of India.

First of all, the transition from “Asia-Pacific” to “Indo-Pacific” is a prominent feature of the Quad in terms of geography, which reflects the geopolitical trend in the disintegration and reconstruction of the regional order.¹⁴ In the past few years, the United States, Japan, and Australia have proposed their own versions of Indo-Pacific strategies or policies based on their own strategic considerations. Although they may differ in detail, the basic concepts are consistent: emphasizing the importance of the Indo-Pacific and supporting the replacement of “Asia-Pacific” with “Indo-Pacific.” When he announced that the US Pacific Command was officially renamed the Indo-Pacific Command, US Defense Secretary James Mattis pointed out the increasing connectivity between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and its vital importance to global maritime security.¹⁵ Moreover, according to the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018, the concept of “Indo-Pacific” has gradually been accepted by the international community and is being included in foreign policy agendas of different countries. This trend underlines the importance of the Indian Ocean. With India’s increasing weight in the world economy, and the growing connectivity between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, the Indo-Pacific is being integrated into a broad strategic region. It is noteworthy that the “Indian Ocean-Pacific” line is precisely the main route of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which, while representing a broad consensus among countries with regard to geopolitical changes, reflects their competition as to the ultimate shape of the Indo-Pacific regional order.

Second, the Quad focuses primarily on cooperation in the security field and stresses to jointly maintain the openness, freedom and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region, which is the cornerstone for quadrilateral cooperation. For example, in January 2018, the third Raisina Dialogue, organized by the

14 “Indo-Pacific” is not a new thing. As early as 2010, there was a round of hype about the concept of “Indo-Pacific” in the United States and Australia, which attracted the attention of Chinese scholars. For representative related research, see Zhao Qinghai, “The Concept of ‘Indo-Pacific’ and Its Meaning to China,” *Contemporary International Relations*, No.7, 2013; Wu Zhaoli, “The Origin of ‘Indo-Pacific’ and the Strategic Game-Playing among Multiple States,” *Pacific Journal*, No.1, 2014.

15 “Remarks at US Indo-Pacific Command Change of Command Ceremony,” US Department of Defense, May 30, 2018, <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/1535689/remarks-at-us-indo-pacific-command-change-of-command-ceremony>.

Indian Ministry of External Affairs and the Observer Research Foundation, was held in India. Although this was a “Track 1.5” dialogue, top active duty military leaders of the United States, Japan, India and Australia all attended and made the “China threat” a discussion topic.¹⁶ The delegates of the Quad countries believed that China had undermined the prosperity, openness and inclusiveness of the Indo-Pacific region, and it was necessary to start from security and strengthen the Quad military cooperation in order to reverse the trend of increasing disparity in the relative strength of regional powers, respond to the rise of China, and force Beijing to change its behavior.¹⁷ In practice, the Malabar military exercise was expected to be an “example” of quadrilateral military cooperation. This exercise was initiated by the United States and India in 1992, and joined by Japan in 2007. So far, the US, Japan and India have carried out the exercise together several times. At the beginning of 2018, there were rumors that Australia would join as well, but in the end India did not extend an invitation.

Third, the Quad attaches importance to economic cooperation, especially in infrastructure construction in the region. The four countries have proposed to promote infrastructure construction with “high standards and high quality,” and opposed “monopolized commercial contracts” by state-owned enterprises, claiming that they will provide more “alternatives” for regional countries in terms of financial and technical support.

As soon as the Quad was revived, the four countries had incorporated economic cooperation into the main agenda. According to reports, in October 2017, a senior US official said that they hoped to hold a meeting as soon as possible to resume the Quad mechanism and, while deepening security cooperation, coordinate financing channels for infrastructure in the region that are different from China.¹⁸ In February 2018, during his

16 These senior military officers in active service include: Admiral Harry Harris Jr., Commander of US Pacific Command; Admiral Sunil Lanba, Chief of the Naval Staff of India; Admiral Katsutoshi Kawano, Chief of Staff, Joint Staff of Japan; and Vice Admiral Tim Barrett, Chief of Navy of Australia.

17 Liu Zongyi, “Raisina Dialogue: What Has the Organizer Done to Chinese Scholars?” January 27, 2018, <http://user.guancha.cn/main/content?id=3332>.

18 “US, Japan, India and Australia to Strengthen Infrastructure Investment Cooperation, Targeting at China’s Belt and Road Initiative,” October 30, 2017, http://www.sohu.com/a/200874644_115479.

visit to the United States, then Australian Prime Minister Turnbull was said to discuss with US President Trump about the possibility of strengthening infrastructure investment cooperation under the Quad framework and seeking an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative.¹⁹ In April 2018, the three countries of the US, Japan and India discussed how to participate in infrastructure development in third countries of the Indo-Pacific region. The three parties reached a consensus that in the future, they would work together to expand business in the same region and country, and coordinate the funding of government-owned financial institutions, so as to efficiently respond to infrastructure needs in Asia. At the same time, the three parties specifically emphasized their advantages in terms of investment transparency and business sustainability.²⁰ This is all-too reminiscent of the unwarranted accusations that they made against China about non-transparent loans and "debt traps" which Beijing creates for host countries. Therefore, although the US, Japan, India and Australia do not recognize that their economic cooperation is intended to counter China, and the US and Australia particularly emphasize that the plan is an alternative, rather than a rivalry, to the Belt and Road Initiative,²¹ their true intentions cannot be clearer.

Then, is the Quad completely geared to target and contain China? The statements and actions of the four countries reflect their contradiction, complexity, and uncertainty in this regard. The Quad is more explicitly targeted at China in the security field, while economically, engagement and containment seem to coexist. The four countries believe that they must cooperate to push back China's influence in the region as China has undermined the rules-based regional order by refusing to recognize the "legitimacy" of the China-Philippines South China Sea arbitration ruling, continuing to carry out construction and militarization of islands and reefs in

19 Phillip Coorey, "Australia Mulls Rival to China's 'Belt and Road' with US, Japan, India," *Financial Review*, February 18, 2018, <http://www.afr.com/news/australia-mulls-rival-to-chinas-belt-and-road-with-us-japan-india-20180216-h0w7k5>.

20 "Australia, US, India and Japan in Talks to Establish Belt and Road Alternative," *Reuters*, February 19, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-beltandroad-quad/australia-u-s-india-and-japan-in-talks-to-establish-belt-and-road-alternative-report-idUSKCN1G20WG>.

21 Phillip Coorey, "Australia Mulls Rival to China's 'Belt and Road' with US, Japan, India."

the waters, and in recent years trying to set up overseas military bases via the construction of ports and industrial parks along the Belt and Road. This kind of security mentality is difficult to change within a short time.

In the economic field, the four countries are worried that China will use the Belt and Road Initiative as an economic tool and “coerce” other countries to achieve its own strategic and security goals.²² Therefore, the essence of the Quad’s stress on transparency of infrastructure projects is to accuse the Belt and Road projects of non-transparency and unfairness. For example, in October 2017, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono said that one purpose of the Quad was to compete with China’s Belt and Road Initiative and its strategy to become a maritime power. The Quad intends to compete with the financial power of China by asserting the right to lead in the formulation of trade rules, so as to “make China invest in infrastructure according to open and transparent international rules.”²³ In the 2017 US National Security Strategy, the precaution about the Belt and Road Initiative was even designated a matter of national security.²⁴ India’s accusation of China on the Maldives issue and Australia’s criticism about China’s assistance in infrastructure building of South Pacific island countries are similarly motivated. As these innuendoes about China continue to reverberate in international public opinion, US think tanks are also actively jumping in with their own ideas, suggesting that the US government should set up funds to finance allies and compensate economic losses as a result of China’s “coercive” economic behavior, such as in the case of Korea’s Lotte Group. In the same report, it was highly recommended that the Quad be taken

22 Please refer to Lou Chunhao, “The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor: Content, Motivation and Prospects,” *China International Studies*, No.2, 2018; Lin Minwang, “India’s Understanding of the Belt and Road Initiative and China’s Policy Choices,” *World Economy and Politics*, No.5, 2015; Xiao Lian, “The Belt and Road Initiative and China-US Economic Competition,” *Pacific Journal*, No.2, 2017; Ma Jianying, “US Understanding of and Responses to China’s Belt and Road Initiative,” *World Economy and Politics*, No.10, 2015; Sun Junjian, “Australia’s Synergy with the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road and Its Prospects,” *Contemporary International Relations*, No.6, 2017.

23 Lin Minwang, “The Construction of ‘Indo-Pacific’ and the Strength of Asia’s Geopolitics,” *Foreign Affairs Review*, No.1, 2018

24 *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, The White House, December 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905-2.pdf>.

advantage of as a platform for raising funds for allies and partners.²⁵

It remains unknown whether the Quad will become a joint force that serves as a rival to the Belt and Road Initiative. Even if the countries act individually, their influence cannot be ignored. According to Pompeo, in Southeast Asia, the United States is the single largest source of cumulative investment surpassing China, Japan and the European Union.²⁶ Deeply involved in Southeast Asia for many years, Japan is far ahead of China in terms of investment stock. India's influence on South Asia and Australia's on South Pacific countries is also self-evident. Therefore, if the US, Japan, India and Australia carry out effective cooperation in the economic field, they will have a major impact on the regional economic order. Compared with the conspicuous but rather "hollow" security cooperation, their work on the economic front will be more low-key and pragmatic, and will have a long-lasting and extensive formative influence on the construction of a new regional order.

Regarding the nature of the Quad, views vary greatly. Some believe that the Quad has already built a rather clear framework of a "quasi-alliance."²⁷ Some even believe that the Quad has developed beyond a quasi-alliance and become a small Asian version of NATO.²⁸ However, there is also other opinion, arguing that the Quad at this point is a strategic partnership, not a formal alliance.²⁹ In my opinion, the current meaning of the Quad lies in its provision of a mechanism for the four countries concerned to coordinate their policies, rather than indicating a single, fixed strategy. It remains very

25 Peter Harrell, Elizabeth Rosenberg and Edoardo Saravalle, "China's Use of Coercive Economic Measures," June 2018.

26 "Remarks on 'America's Indo-Pacific Economic Vision'."

27 Qu Caiyun, "Analysis on the Limitations of Strategic Cooperation among Japan, US, Australia and India," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, No.1, 2018.

28 Ma Jianying, "The Asian Version of NATO and How Should China Respond," *Leadership Science*, No.3, 2018.

29 Gurmeer Kanwal, "East Asia Summit: 'The Quad' Rises from the Dead to Take on China," *The Quint*, November 14, 2017, <https://www.thequint.com/voices/opinion/oped-east-asia-summit-the-quad-in-indo-pacific-china>; Tan Ming Hui and Nazia Hussain, "Quad 2.0: Sense and Sensibilities: the Reborn Quad Should not be Read as a First Step toward an 'Asian NATO'," *The Diplomat*, February 23, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/02/quad-2-0-sense-and-sensibilities>; Grant Wyeth, "Why Has Australia Shifted Back to the Quad?" *The Diplomat*, November 16, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/why-has-australia-shifted-back-to-the-quad>.

uncertain whether it will ultimately develop into an alliance, which is subject to both the policy considerations of individual member countries and the development of the regional situation as a whole, with special regard to the evolution of China's policies.³⁰ From inside the Quad itself, India's policies and positions are the most uncertain. Although New Delhi seemed to use the Quad mechanism as a tool to confront China after the bilateral tensions in 2017, there has been a clear shift in China-India relations since 2018. Leaders of China and India met in Wuhan at the end of April 2018. In June, while expressing his support for a "free and open Indo-Pacific region" during the Shangri-La Dialogue, Modi said nothing about the Quad. Instead, he said that "India does not see the Indo-Pacific Region as a strategy or as a club of limited members. Nor as a grouping that seeks to dominate. And by no means do we consider it as directed against any country."³¹

The Quad mechanism is often mentioned together with the Indo-Pacific strategy of the United States. There are still many scholars who believe that the Quad is indeed part of the Indo-Pacific strategic concept launched by the Trump administration. They consider the Quad as an important step forward in the emerging Indo-Pacific strategy, marking a major breakthrough in consensus on the strategy.³² Although the membership, objectives and major cooperation content of the Quad are largely consistent with the US-proposed Indo-Pacific strategy, they are obviously different in terms of motivation and evolution. The major promoters of the Quad are Japan and Australia, not the US. After the Abe government officially proposed the "free and open Indo-Pacific strategy" in 2016, Japan and Australia expressed their welcome for a stronger US

30 Zhang Feng, "The Imagination of 'Indo-Pacific': Where from and Where to Go."

31 "Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri-La Dialogue," Ministry of External Affairs of India, June 1, 2018, http://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime_Ministers_Keynote_Address_at_Shangri-La_Dialogue_June_01_2018.

32 Wu Zhaoli, "Development and Limitation of the Indo-Pacific Strategy and China's Response," *Journal of Xinjiang Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, No.5, 2018; Xia Liping and Zhong Qi, "Analysis of the Trump Administration's Indo-Pacific Strategic Concept," *Contemporary International Relations*, No.1, 2018; Chen Jimin, "The Trump Administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy: Policies and Limitations," *Peace and Development*, No.1, 2018.

presence in the Indo-Pacific region at their seventh “2+2” meeting in April 2017. The main purpose of Japan and Australia was to ensure that the US “stay” in the region. While the US accepts and joins the Quad somewhat passively, it does so in line with Trump’s demand that US allies shoulder more security responsibilities. Mattis said at the Shangri-La Dialogue that the Quad was born at the right time and that the US would provide 100% support for it, but he also admitted that in the originally prepared speech, he almost forgot to mention the Quad.³³ In terms of timing and the effectiveness of actions, the Trump administration only proposed the idea of “Indo-Pacific strategy” in November 2017, and very few follow-up actions have been seen thus far. Besides, the Trump administration’s willingness and ability to invest in the Indo-Pacific strategy has been widely questioned. After the US withdrew from the TPP, it has not formulated a positive trade policy. While criticizing the Belt and Road Initiative, it has not provided an alternative source of investment for developing countries in the region. Pompeo announced \$113 million in new US initiatives to support foundational areas of the future that represents “just a down payment on a new era in US economic commitment to peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region.” Aside from being nothing more than a down payment, \$113 million means little in the face of huge infrastructure needs of the Indo-Pacific region.³⁴ Thus, it is not difficult to understand why other countries lack confidence that the US has the will and ability to continuously maintain its strategic leadership. They further question the time when the US Indo-Pacific strategy can be implemented.³⁵ Therefore, the Quad is a mechanism for regional dialogue and coordination quite independent from the US Indo-Pacific strategy. And because it is being promoted by Japan and Australia, the Quad may develop faster than the US Indo-Pacific strategy in both economic and security fields.

33 Euan Graham, “Mindful Mattis Did Just Fine at the Shangri-La Dialogue,” *The Interpreter*, June 4, 2018, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/mindful-mattis-did-just-fine-at-the-shangri-la-dialogue>.

34 “Remarks on ‘America’s Indo-Pacific Economic Vision’.”

35 Josh Rogin, “Trump’s Indo-Pacific Strategy: Where’s the Beef,” *The Washington Post*, June 6, 2018; Chen Jimin, “The Indo-Pacific Strategy of the Trump Administration: Policy and Limitations.”

China's Response

With the rise of emerging powers, the diversification of global powers and economic globalization have become the prevailing trends. It is difficult for the existing international governance framework to adapt to the development of new global landscape and new set of conditions, which will sooner or later result in the collapse of the old order.³⁶ The deconstruction and reorganization of the order in the Asia-Pacific region is integral to, and the most important element of, the reconstruction of the world order, because this region is not only one of the strongest drivers of global economy, but also a place where China and the US have the greatest intersecting interests. The direction of the Asia-Pacific order will affect to a considerable extent the future of globalization and multilateralism.

Since the Obama administration, the US-led Asia-Pacific order has been challenged and buffeted. After Trump took office, the process of deconstruction and reconstruction has accelerated markedly. The Quad is precisely a new mechanism that emerged in this process, which was born and resuscitated because of major changes in the regional order. Since its resumption, the Quad has been assigned the “mission” of building a new regional order. The success of this mission lies in whether the cooperation under its framework can be further institutionalized, and whether the ideas and organizational structure which the Quad advocates can be developed into the core of the new order. The more important significance to following the Quad's evolution is that its resumption reflects the undergoing trend in Asia toward a new order based on the “Indo-Pacific region.” Therefore, the future trend of this region will be featured by the “Indo-Pacific” notion in terms of geopolitics, based on diverse drivers, and composed of multiple structures with more “mutually competing” concepts of what that order should look like.

36 Amitav Acharya, “The End of the American World Order and the Advent of a Multiplex World,” *World Economics and Politics*, No.6, 2017.

The free, open, rules-based regional order proposed by the Quad and the existing US-led Asia-Pacific order basically share the same values, although the former is geographically expanded and adjusted. It can be said that the Quad has inherited, developed and optimized the current Asia-Pacific order, with the aim of safeguarding the shared values and national interests of the US, Japan, India and Australia through collective cooperation, in the context of the demise of US power. It behooves China to pay close attention to the negative side of this concept of regional order, as it reflects a trend which views Beijing as the opposite or an “imaginary enemy.”

Even though China has reiterated that it will “always be the builder of world peace, the contributor to global development, and the defender of the international order,”³⁷ China is “judged” as trying to change, together with Russia, the international order and challenge the power, influence and interests of the United States as the US regards China as a strategic rival. Particularly, in the Indo-Pacific region, China is viewed as seeking to take the place of the US, expand its economic model, and reshape the regional order.³⁸ Such a “judgment” is an artificial attempt to create a model of two opposing blocs and thus return to the Cold War paradigm, which is also called a “new Cold War.”³⁹ Therefore, China needs to analyze and respond to the Quad in the context of the adjustment of regional order and of Beijing-Washington bilateral relations.

First, while managing the strategic competition with the United States, China should avoid excessively challenging the existing pattern of interests at the global level, and prevent at the regional level the small- and medium-sized countries from balancing against Beijing, thus averting a confrontation between military and economic blocs in the region.⁴⁰ This is consistent with

37 Xi Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era – Report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China,” *People’s Daily*, October 28, 2017, pp. 1-5.

38 *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*.

39 He Yafei, “Building a New Asia-Pacific Security Order in the Midst of Great Turmoil,” *Global Times*, July 23, 2018.

40 Liu Feng, “China-US Strategic Competition and East Asia’s Security Situation,” *Contemporary International Relations*, No.8, 2017; Sun Xuefeng, “China’s Security Strategy in the Era of China-US Strategic Competition,” *Strategic Decision Studies*, No.2, 2018.

China's emphasis on being the defender of the international and regional order.

Second, China should seek dialogue and cooperation with a variety of regional mechanisms, including the Quad. Due to complex historical traditions and geographical environment, even in a regional order dominated by US military alliances, a variety of multilateral dialogue mechanisms have taken shape, such as the APEC, the ASEAN Regional Forum, and the East Asia Summit. For a long time, these mechanisms have provided an important guarantee for regional prosperity and stability. It should be noted that the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative and AIIB, as well as the Quad, are all new multilateral mechanisms designed to cope with regional changes. This is also in line with the characteristics of the Asia-Pacific region and the changed situation. After all, in the Asia-Pacific region, the construction of new relations and a new political order may not be achieved through a single regional mechanism, but through step-by-step development of new relations and mechanisms on the basis of mutually beneficial cooperation and win-win progress.⁴¹ The most crucial issue is how to make the cooperation between these mechanisms greater than their competition, or at least prevent any competition from prevailing over cooperation.

Take the Belt and Road Initiative as an example. President Xi Jinping has pointed out that China's Belt and Road Initiative may be China's idea, but its opportunities and outcomes are going to benefit the world. China has no geopolitical calculations, seeks no exclusionary blocs and imposes no business deals on others.⁴² The Chinese Foreign Ministry also stated that infrastructure is an important driving force for economic development. "We welcome larger inputs into the infrastructure field from other countries. All countries should strengthen such kind of international cooperation under the principle of openness, inclusiveness and mutually beneficial cooperation so as to promote regional and global economic development for the benefit

41 Zhang Yunling, "Asia-Pacific Regional Relations and Mechanisms in Transformation."

42 "Openness for Greater Prosperity, Innovation for a Better Future: Keynote Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping at the Opening of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2018," April 10, 2018, <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201804/10/WS5acc515ca3105cdcf6517425.html>.

of all.” “Any country, as long as they share the same principle and vision, could take part in this open and inclusive (Belt and Road) initiative.”⁴³ Since the Quad also advocates openness and cooperation, asserting that their cooperation in infrastructure is only aimed at providing more “alternatives” for countries concerned and offering additional funds for development, rather than competing with the Belt and Road Initiative, China can take advantage of this, and promote cooperation to build “more belts and more roads” in the spirit of openness, inclusiveness, and win-win cooperation. There is a clear possibility that more options will emerge for a regional order more in line with economic development of the region as a whole and the national interests of individual countries. Of course, with regard to security, the situation will be different. On the one hand, the Quad’s claims to maintain the freedom, openness and stability of the Indo-Pacific waters are not in conflict with China’s new security concept. On the other hand, China needs to be more strategically patient as it tries to eliminate regional strategic confrontation caused by its building of maritime power. While safeguarding core national interests, China should also demonstrate its determination to peaceful rise through concrete actions, and build political and security mutual trust with its neighbors.

Last but not least, China should attach importance to the attitudes and roles of other countries in the region, especially the ASEAN countries. At present, ASEAN is striving to avoid choosing sides in the China-US rivalry, hoping that the Belt and Road Initiative of China, which advocates openness and cooperation, can synergize with the Quad. According to statements of the four Quad countries at the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue, ASEAN is of interest for them as they seek to build a regional order. ASEAN is also eager to maintain its central position in regional affairs and play a coordinator’s role. In this regard, China can take advantage of the trend and continue to support ASEAN’s positive role. 🧩

43 “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang’s Regular Press Conference on February 23, 2018,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, February 23, 2018, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1537055.shtml.