

QUAD: A RECIPE FOR CONFRONTATION OR STABILITY?

Sheharyar Khan* & Dost Mohammad**

Abstract

Quad or Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a group of four democracies, the US, India, Japan, and Australia, was first proposed in 2007 by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in his 'confluence of two seas' speech that subsequently embarked on the path to the foundation of the group. Quad perceives China's economic growth, which enables her to transform the world order as a threat and aims at containing the growing Chinese assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region. The Malabar naval exercises in the Indian Ocean by the Quad members were one such exercise. This paper, aims to analyze the formation of Quad and will contemplate whether the group is causing confrontation or stability in the Asia-Pacific and Indo-Pacific regions. The paper will also assess that the Quad is designed to counter China's growing influence in the Asia- pacific and Indo-pacific regions. Containing China is likely to create a confrontation in the region.

Keywords: *Quad, Malabar Naval Exercise, Containment, Indo-Pacific, US Indo-Pacific Strategy*

Introduction

The Quad, also known as the quadrilateral Security Dialogue, comprises four democracies, the US, India, Japan, and Australia. Interestingly, the idea of Quad was first presented in 2007 by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in his 'confluence of two seas' speech that later heralded the path to the foundation of the group.¹ China is emerging as a formidable threat to the Quad in the Indo-Pacific region and the creation of a quadrilateral coalition in 2017, by and large, is attributed

* Associate Professor of IR, Social Sciences Department, Iqra University, Islamabad. Email: sher.tr@gmail.com.

** Research Associate at India Study Centre, the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI). Email : bareach87@gmail.com.

¹ Vaibhav Kullashri, "Quad Grouping and India's Role in It," *The Kootneeti*, July 8, 2020, <https://thekootneeti.in/2020/07/08/quad-grouping-and-indias-role-in-it>.

to thwarting Chinese increasing influence in the region.² The primary objective of the Quad is to have a free and open Indo-Pacific region. The democratic norms consolidate ties of the Quad members and view China as a nationalistic and authoritarian government, crushing pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong, and incarcerating Muslims in concentration camps in its Western region of Xinjiang. They suspected that Beijing has been stepping up threats of military force to occupy Taiwan.³ In the pretext of democracy, China's negation of democratic norms in Hong Kong and its growing foothold in the Asia-Pacific and Indo-Pacific regions bring the members of the Quad closer to countering China. Malabar Naval Exercises by Quad members in the Indian Ocean are designed to encircle China and to slow down its economic growth that by and large would have monolithic implications for the region as well as for the world. Such aggressive moves clarify that the group instead of a recipe for stability in the future is likely to open the way for a confrontation.

This paper looks into the changing geo-political and geo-strategic dimensions in the Indo-pacific region with the lens of neo-realism. This theory tells us that the changing power equation in the region has affected the behaviour of the regional countries and powers. Since China has seen growth in power, it has affected the power equation. The rise of China has caused fear in the US, which is the reigning power. The structural change has caused a response from the US and its allies. The US feels challenged in the region and has resorted to external balancing by making a coalition of like-minded countries---the Quad. This alliance may not been possible if China was not rising and asserting itself. Based on this theory, this paper argues that the formation of the Quad is intended for containing the rising China. The containment would also entail confrontation. Instead of creating stability in the region, there is likelihood that it will lead to hostility. There is a convergence of interests among the Quad countries to contain China in the region. This will provide a balancing act in the region. But, this alliance does not seem to be defensive. The US is known for its offensive realist policies. It is thus further argued that the US and its allies, Quad, will pursue offensive realist policies and strategies against China. It is upto China, that how it perceives and responds to this alliance. This study uses qualitative analysis of the situation and takes stock of the historical development in the region.

Convergence among Quad Members

China's remarkable economic growth has enabled her to modernize its military, and enhance its economic, political, and diplomatic

² Ibid.

³ Z. Rasheed, "What is the Quad and can it Counter China's Rise?" *Al Jazeera*, November 25, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/25/what-is-the-quad-can-us-india-japan-and-australia-deter-china>.

clouds in the Asia-Pacific and Indo-Pacific regions, resulting in the creation of predicaments for the Quad countries. The US under the umbrella of the Quad leaves no stone unturned to thwart the Chinese presence and metaphorically uses the Quad as a shared interest in cementing a rule-based order in the Indo-Pacific region.⁴ The US officials under Trump's administration maintained that the US and India were the two largest democracies of the world and their democratic values had been intertwined by reinforcement of democracy. It further reiterated that the Quad, by all means, was an inclusive group, all four countries of the group were keen on welcoming other democratic countries into the group for cooperation.⁵ The US under Quad has accentuated a slogan of the "free and open" Indo-Pacific region. Washington's relations have further exacerbated with Beijing due to the prevailing trade war, South China Sea conundrum, the coronavirus fallout, human rights issue in Xinjiang, the crackdown in Hong Kong, the Taiwan crisis, intellectual property theft, press freedoms, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) race.⁶

In order to contain China, Japan has already started sharing intelligence with India, and Australia. Tokyo has regularly been sharing intelligence with Washington. Most considerably, Japan within its Ministry of Defence has established a new division to accelerate coordination with India and Australia on ASEAN and Pacific Island issues.⁷ Tokyo in its annual defense White Paper unveiled in July 2020 asserted that "China has relentlessly continued unilateral attempts to change the status quo by coercion in the sea area around the Senkaku Islands, leading to a grave matter of concern."⁸ Japan single-handedly unable to counter Beijing's unstoppable influence in the region views the Quad as a formidable platform to prevent China.⁹

New Delhi like Tokyo via the Quad intends to reduce China's ascendancy in the Indo-Pacific region and is thoroughly obsessed with reducing the latter's political and economic power in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as well as in the East and the African coastlines in the West. The Quad appears to be an application platform for New Delhi to oppose China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).¹⁰ It also

⁴ "Quad Countries Interested in Strengthening Rules-Based Order in Indo-Pacific," *Mint*, October 24, 2020, <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Derek Grossman, "The Quad is Poised to become Openly Anti-China Soon," *RAND*, July 28, 2020 <https://www.rand.org/blog/2020/07/the-quad-is-poised-to-become-openly-anti-china-soon.html>.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ "Why India must Exercise the Quad Option," *The Times of India*, October 15, 2020, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/why-india-must-exercise-the-quadoption/articleshow/78676596.cms>.

remains the top priority of India to have uninterrupted access to ports across the Indo-Pacific region. However, Beijing's naval base at Djibouti in Africa clearly poses a grave threat to Indian interest in the region.¹¹ Consequently, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has forged agreements with Assumption Island (Seychelles), and Duqm (Oman) to protect Indian naval routes. India intends to leverage QUAD to protect its national interest in the Indo-Pacific region and exploit the Quad partnership as a bulwark against China.¹² S. Jaishankar, the Indian Foreign Minister in the Quad forum, articulated that "rebalance of global geopolitics is already underway; India is stepping out as never before. But India seeks to do a lot more, for instance, get into the driving seat of the Quad because this could be the core of new security architecture."¹³

Meanwhile, Australia is dissatisfied with China over the mishandling of human rights violations in Xinjiang and the demonstrations in Hong Kong. Canberra is deeply suspicious of Beijing's increasing influence on its domestic issues, ranging from politics to real estate and educational institutions. Both states are at daggers drawn on ideological issues too. Canberra is committed to reduce its excessive dependence on China, trying to bolster its ties with ideological partners of the Quad. Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison argues that it is in the national interest of the country to be aligned with "like-minded democracies" to stop China's expansion and aggression.¹⁴ Marise Payne, Australian Foreign Minister, in this regard, asserts that there is a need for an inclusive Indo-Pacific region that ought to be governed by rules and not by domination.¹⁵

The US administration under the presidency of Joe Biden looks forward to underpin the Quad to impede China's rapid assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region. Biden, in Quad virtual summit held on March 12, 2020, emphasized "free and open Indo-Pacific" and also indicated that the Quad would remain a key component in the US Indo-Pacific strategy. He further reiterated that the members of the Quad were going to play a crucial role in cooperation in the Indo-Pacific strategy.¹⁶ His predecessor Trump sought to punish China by following unilateral tools for instance imposing

¹¹ Derek Grossman, "India Is the Weakest Link in the Quad," *Foreign Policy*, July 23, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/07/23/india-is-the-weakest-link-in-the-quad/>.

¹² Derek Grossman, "India Is the Weakest Link in the Quad."

¹³ Indrani Bagchi, ET Bureau, "Chinese Belligerence: Whither Goes India, Will Go the Quad and the IndoPacific," *The Economic Times*, October 17, 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/chineser/>.

¹⁴ A Sadana, "Explained: Why Australia-China Ties have gone Down Under," *The Indian Express*, October 9, 2020, <https://indianexpress.com/article/>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Abhijnan Rej, "In 'Historic' Summit Quad Commits to Meeting Key Indo-Pacific Challenges," *The Diplomat* March 13, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/03/>.

tariffs and sanctions. Biden, unlike, Trump has been trying to enhance the US strength by winning the confidence of his allies to work closely in the region.¹⁷ At the same time, Wang Yi, Chinese Foreign Minister had termed the Quad as an “Indo-Pacific NATO” through which the US had been striving to contain Beijing. Yi further said that the genesis of the Quad was based on the Cold War mentality, stirring up confrontation, aimed at stoking geopolitical competition to perpetuate the US hegemonic system in the world.¹⁸

The US Indo-Pacific Strategy

US is regarded as the leader of the Indo-Pacific region. The bona fide objectives of the US Indo-Pacific Strategy are to prevent China and to securitize its core interest in the region.¹⁹ India continues to play a vital role in the US Indo-Pacific Strategy. Japan, a pivotal partner of the US is unconformable with China’s growing economic and military powers, perceives, Beijing as a serious challenge, and believes the US as a reliable partner in the US Indo-Pacific Strategy. Australia warmly welcomes the US Indo-Pacific Strategy. Australian support for Indo-Pacific Strategy is aimed at enhancing its presence and interest in Southeast Asia.²⁰ Singapore and Indonesia have also welcomed the US Indo-Pacific Strategy that greatly expands the significance of their strategic locations.²¹

The Trump administration declassified the 2018 US Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific (SFIP) on January 5, 2021. The document revealed continuation of the US dominance in the region, bolstering economic ties with Southeast Asia by espousing trade agreements and investment standards set by the United States, and reducing the region’s economic reliance on China.²² SFIP underscores that US-China’s strategic competition will intensify by virtue of the US divergent goals and nature of economic and political systems of China as the latter tries its utmost to circumvent international rules for its advantage. The US blames Beijing’s intention to weaken the former’s alliances and its partnerships in the region. In the containment of China, India would play as a catalyst to counterbalance China. Beijing’s economic, military and diplomatic

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ananth Krishnan, “China’s Foreign Minister Says U.S. Using Quad to Build ‘Indo-Pacific NATO,’” *The Hindu*, October 13, 2020, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/>

¹⁹ “The Indo-Pacific Strategy: A Background Analysis,” *ISPI*, June 4, 2018, <https://www.ispionline.it/it/>

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Sebastian Strangio, “What Does the US Indo-Pacific Framework Say About Southeast Asia?” *The Diplomat*, January 13, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/01/what-does-the-us-indo-pacific-framework-say-about-southeast-asia/>.

influence would expand, challenging the US and preventing her from not gaining its national interest in the Indo-Pacific region.²³

SFIP documents appear to be China-centric cautioning the US allies that China is making inroads into cutting-edge technologies, including biogenetics artificial intelligence that will largely pave the way for consolidation of authoritarianism in the region. Chinese headways in these technologies certainly would pose a grave challenge to their societies.²⁴ Chinese progress in surveillance and information control thwarts the US efforts in the expansion of its national interest and values in the Indo-Pacific region.²⁵

China believes that the Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) of the US is based on the construction of an exclusive regional group to oppose Beijing. China fears that the implementation of the US strategy will pose a serious threat from three broader perspectives, i.e., in the domain of regional economic cooperation, strategic extension, and protection of regional vital interests. Through IPS the US will create troubles for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and counter Beijing in the South China Sea (SCS). It is worth mentioning that the US under the Trump administration has approximately carried out 14 Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) against China in South China Sea (SCS).²⁶ SCS is another important combat zone for the US to restrain China economically, politically, and militarily.²⁷ Assumably, IPS, instead of stability, is opening the path to confrontation. The US views China as a belligerent and an existential threat to the Western interests, and global and regional order. Such aggressive acts of the US may provoke China in the near future. The US antagonistic posture toward China will cause a confrontation in the region, risking a pointless Cold War with China.²⁸

Meanwhile, the Biden administration in the Indo-Pacific Strategy, unlike Trump, is unlikely to be espousing the policy of complete confrontation. US will remain tough on China. However, it is likely to cooperate with Beijing on climate change and is expected to follow the path of Obama by giving a great deal of importance to the liberal economic order and strengthening diplomatic ties with partners. The new

²³ American Institute in Taiwan, 13, 2021, https://www.ait.org.tw/wp-content/uploads/sites/269/IPS-Final-Declass_OCR.pdf.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ "Indo-Pacific Strategy and China's Response," The Institute for China-America Studies (ICAS), October, 2019, <https://chinaus-icas.org/staging/6779/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Indo-Pacific-Strategy-and-Chinas-Response.pdf>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Michael D. Swaine, "Creating an Unstable Asia: the U.S. "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" Strategy," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, March 2, 2018, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/02/creating-unstable-asia-u.s.-free-and-open-indo-pacific-strategy-pub-75720>.

administration is committed to countering Beijing's territorial aggression, diplomatic assertiveness, and economic coercion. Such coercive steps against Beijing in the Indo-Pacific region will certainly incite a confrontation.²⁹

China's Presence in the Region Threat to Quad Countries?

The Indo-Pacific region has become an epicentre of the world's attention, connecting an extensive swath of the globe, resulting in becoming a major threat among global and regional players. The "Indo-Pacific" term indicates New Delhi's importance in the region, as it connects India with its western boundaries and recognizes it as a key player in the geopolitics of the twenty-first century in the region. Any threat and event can have a huge impact on India's economy and its strategic interests. Major players recognize the pivotal role of New Delhi in maintaining a balance against China. The countries comprising Quad have demonstrated their intentions of countering China in the Indo-pacific.³⁰ They perceive China as an expansionist power, claiming maritime territory in South China and East China seas. The US diplomatic ties with Taiwan further provoke Beijing, consequently making the latter more belligerent in the region.³¹

The US National Defense Strategy in its January 2018, says that China is engaged in a military modernization program, and desires to have hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region achieve global dominance instead of US.³² While China is suspicious of the US's freedom of navigation operations (FONO) in the South China Sea, believes that such a move will violate Chinese sovereignty. The US along with India, Japan, and the Philippines carried out FONO exercises in the SCS. Biden administration has been toughening its posture on Beijing's claims in SCS. The US in its latest Freedom of Navigation Operation (FONOP) in SCS deployed the

²⁹ "Biden's Indo-Pacific Strategy: Expectations and Challenges," *Institute of South Asian Studies*, April 15, 2021, <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Bidens-Indo-Pacific-Final.pdf>.

³⁰ Saloni Salil, "Beijing's Great Game in the Indo-Pacific: Future Dynamics," *Future Directions International*, October 28, 2020, <https://www.futuredirections.org.au/publication/beijings-great-game-in-the-indo-pacific-future-dynamics/>

³¹ Ibid.

³² Xiang Bo, "China Urges US to Abandon Cold War Mentality," *Xinhuanet*, December 19, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-12/19/c_136838057.htm

guided-missile destroyer, USS Russell, into the 12 nautical mile zone around the Chinese-claimed islands in the Spratly.³³

The Biden administration castigates China's recently-passed Coast Guard Law, terming it as a source of deep "concern." It is a part of the Asian superpower's broader effort to coercively "assert its unlawful maritime claims in the South China Sea."³⁴ China's new maritime law has infuriated the US and its allies. Biden is believed to have been following a trajectory of his predecessor, showcasing belligerent pushback against China's maritime assertiveness in Asia. Meanwhile, China has alleged the Biden administration of violating China's security and sovereignty and disturbing regional peace and stability. The US is intentionally engaged in the South China Sea to disrupt its conducive environment of peace.³⁵ Japan, on the other hand, is concerned about China's latest move by entering its Coast Guard vessels in the East China Sea. Tokyo considers it contested water that is likely to trigger a war between both states. China's new "open fire" law may further exacerbate the already fragile ties between the Quad members and China.³⁶

The issue of Taiwan is a bone of contention between Quad members and China. Beijing terms any arms sale to Taiwan as violation of the "One China Policy". Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Zhao Lijian has asserted that there is just 'One China' and Taiwan is an inseparable part of its territory.³⁷ The promised military talks between US and Taiwan have also irked China. Beijing has urged Washington to "immediately stop any form of official exchanges and military links with Taiwan, to avoid further damaging stability in the Taiwan Strait and Sino-US relations".³⁸ In order to exploit the Quad forum, the US may also embroil India in the Taiwan issue, and create hardships for Beijing in its peripheries.³⁹

The economic and political influence of China in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) states has increased manifold. Even Vietnam, regards the US an unreliable partner and is looking for other options to resolve its dispute with China over the South China Sea. Trump in his presidency was unwilling to participate in the annual summit of the ASEAN creating a vacuum to be filled by China. Beijing, meanwhile has

³³ Richard Javad Heydarian, "Pressure Mounts on Beijing in the South China Sea," *Asia Times*, February 26, 2021, <https://asiatimes.com/2021/02/pressure-mounts-on-beijing-in-the-south-china-sea/>

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian's Regular Press Conference, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, October 20, 2020.

³⁸ Staff, "China says it will Respond to Planned Taiwan, U.S. Defense Talks U.S.," Reuters, January 6, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/>

³⁹ Ibid.

signed a trade pact with 14 other Asian states. A Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) 2020 survey claims that ASEAN countries regard China as a formidable political power as compared to the US in Southeast Asia. Even the ASEAN countries have outstripped the European Union (EU), becoming China's major trading partner.⁴⁰

The withdrawal from Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) both are reckoned as the world's largest economic blocs, heralding way for China's increasing influence in the Indo-Pacific region, consequently, damaging the US geo-economic and geo-strategic interests. The US's aggressive moves against China, by and large, may create the likelihood of a confrontation in the region.⁴¹

Malabar Naval Exercise by Quad Countries

The US and India began Malabar-I Naval Exercise in 1992. The exercises were a part of joint training between both countries in basic sea-based operations. The exercises were discontinued due to Indian nuclear tests in 1998 only to be resumed in 2002. Since 2002, the exercise remained an annual feature between the US and India. Japan and Australia, following in the footsteps of the US and India, joined the exercise in 2015 and 2007 respectively.⁴² The Malabar exercise involve different naval operations including simulated war games and combat maneuvers.⁴³ It is pertinent to mention here, that all four states of Malabar exercises, interestingly, are also members of the Quad.

The formation of the quadrilateral coalition in 2017 and Malabar exercises by Quad members were designed to prevent China's growing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region.⁴⁴ China was perceived as a grave threat to freedom of navigation, respect for territorial integrity, rule of law, sovereignty, peaceful dispute resolution and free trade markets.⁴⁵ The first phase of the Malabar exercise started on November 3-6, 2020 in the Bay of Bengal in the Indian Ocean, where sophisticated and complex maneuvers were carried out, including submarines, anti-air warfare drills, and surface weapon firing exercises. The participation of Australia in the

⁴⁰ Dost Muhammad Barrech, "Biden's Dilemma in the Indo-Pacific," *Pakistan Today*, January 29, 2021.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Krishn Kaushik, "Explained: The Purpose, Participants of the Malabar Navy Exercise," *The Indian Express*, November 3, 2020, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/malabar-naval-exercise-india-6915447>.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ "Why India must Exercise the Quad Option," *The Times of India*, October 15, 2020, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/why-india-must-exercise-the-quadoption/articleshow/78676596.cms>.

Malabar Naval Exercise in 2007 was also aimed at preventing China's maneuvering, opening a path to a confrontation in the region.⁴⁶

Within Quad, the US and India had an excessive preoccupation with the containment of China via Malabar exercises. The exercises reassure in mounting pressure on China. India remained engaged in a military stand-off with China; confronted humiliation in June 2020 and is now is committed to retaliating against China. In this regard, the *Hindustan Times* by alluding to Malabar Naval Exercise writes, "The road to peace in the mountains may lie through the sea."⁴⁷ In the meantime, an Indian defense analyst Captain D. K. Sharma argues that Malabar Exercise will certainly prove helpful for New Delhi as "It will be the best of the best."⁴⁸

An aggressive mind set of India had clearly been reflected by retired Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan who says that Malabar manoeuvres have bolstered the naval power of Quad countries in the Indian Ocean. India has given a lucid message to Beijing that New Delhi is not alone in the region.⁴⁹ A strategic expert, Alok Bansal, opines that existing maneuvers are prerequisite to build cohesion among the navies of Quad countries, particularly in the event of war with China. The contemplations of Indian policymakers and experts are obvious; they are preoccupied with the Quad and Malabar exercises but are oblivious to the fact that their unprofessional demeanours will cause a confrontation in the region. It is crystal clear, that India cannot compete with China economically, politically, and militarily and will cajole its partners to prevent a Chinese foothold in the region. Indeed, the containment policy of Quad to bring peace in the region remains elusive; it is more likely to embark on a path to a confrontation with China in near future.⁵⁰

The Implications of the Malabar Naval Exercise for the Region

China is being perceived as a threat by Quad members due to its hostility with the US, a border dispute with India, maritime brawl with Japan, and exacerbating diplomatic and economic tussle with Australia. The prevailing differences with China have brought Quad members

⁴⁶ "Navies of India, US, Japan, Australia Conclude Phase 1 of Malabar 2020 Naval Exercise," *The Economic Times*, November 7, 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/>

⁴⁷ "What is the Malabar Exercise, and Why is it Significant," *Deccan Herald*, October 20, 2020, <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/what-is-the-malabar-exercise-and-why-is-it-significant904598.html>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ravi Dubey, "Malabar Naval Exercise 2020: What is so Special about it that Worries China?" *DNA India*, November 19, 2020, <https://www.dnaindia.com/analysis/>

⁵⁰ Ibid.

together to put China under tremendous pressure to eschew its mounting assertiveness in the region. Malabar Naval Exercise, thus, is an appropriate platform to thwart China's aspirations of becoming a dominant world power. Cmdr. Ryan T. Easterday, commanding officer asserts that "Malabar provides an opportunity for like-minded navies, sharing a common vision of a more stable, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific, to operate and train alongside one another."⁵¹

However, Malabar Naval Exercises have many implications for the region. China remains quite wary of the annual exercises. According to *Global Times* a Chinese newspaper, the primary objective of the Malabar's Naval Exercises is to target China's submarines activities in South China and East China seas. The editorial claims that US and Indian navies have been operating variations of the P-8 Poseidon.⁵² Beijing also has reservations over the deployment of the Japan's largest post-World War II warship, Izumo in the South China Sea that has spent time there before heading towards India. It was carrying up nine helicopters and conducting flight operations in the South China Sea will offend China. In this regard, Hua Chunying, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson says:

If this is only about normal visits and normal transit through the South China Sea, we hold no objection and hope that such normal exchanges between relevant countries can help promote peace and stability in the region. But if it is going to the South China Sea for other motives, it would be a different story.⁵³

Beijing is alienated by Tokyo's inclusion in the Malabar Exercise alleging, that it may provoke hostility in the region. Hong Lei, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman says, China hoped that the inclusion of Japan in the Malabar Exercise will not provoke a confrontation in the region. Lie further reiterated: "China respects freedom of navigation enjoyed by all countries in the SCS according to the international law."⁵⁴ It should be noted that the members of Quad and China are accelerating their military defense exponentially. The Quad has collectively spent nearly US\$ 876.6

⁵¹ Jesse Johnson, "Malabar Military Exercises with 'Quad' Nations Begin in Message to China," *The Japan Times*, November 4, 2020, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/11/04/asia-pacific/malabar-military-exercises-china-quad/>.

⁵² "China Wary as US, India and Japan Prep for Malabar Naval Drills," *Stars and Stripes*, April 14, 2021, <https://www.stripes.com/news/china-wary-as-us-india-and-japan-prep-for-malabar-naval-drills-1.476863>.

⁵³ "China Wary as US, India and Japan Prep for Malabar Naval Drills."

⁵⁴ "China Reacts Sharply to Japan's Inclusion in Malabar Exercises," *The Economic Times*, December 14, 2015, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/>

billion on their military defense in 2020, while China in the same year alone has spent US 261 billion dollars.⁵⁵

The Indo-Pacific region, arguably, has become a new battlefield, where the world's advanced and sophisticated technologies are used in the naval exercises certainly do not augur well for regional stability. History is a tangible testimony; many wars around the world have been triggered by miscalculations. In the case of Quad's confrontation with China, any miscalculation could also cause a devastating war. One can assume that the forging of Quad followed by Malabar Exercises will create instability in the region. In short, alliances are superficially formed to contain or defeat the rival state. The word 'containment' is an antithesis of 'stability'.⁵⁶

Summation

The military build-up in the form of military exercises and strategic cooperation among Quad countries indicate that the Neo-realist world has taken shape given the changing power equilibrium. China's rise has prompted regional powers like India, Australia, and Japan to team up with the Superpower, US, to contain China's rise. This change of behaviour is caused by a change in the security structure in the Indo-pacific region. The very nature of alliance and containment is indicative of confrontation rather than providing stability in the region. We can expect further escalation in terms of military build-up and Cold War-like politics in the region. This will ultimately lead to some sort of confrontation. Quad countries see the region in terms of a zero-sum game where the gains of China are considered as a loss for these powers. This article claims that the making of the Quad and subsequent policy actions in the Indo-pacific region do not bring stability, but rather to contain the rise of China, which has created fear among the Quad countries. They see their security being compromised by the power of China. The article argues that this will not augur well for the region since checking the Chinese power will prompt reactions from Beijing as well. Such a heated environment becomes prone to confrontation. The formation of Quad and its military exercises can be easily taken as a threat by China.

According to the theory of Neo-realism, China' will try to balance this multilateral alliance. China's rise has changed the balance power in the region, but the Quad alliance can tilt the balance in its own favour. Subsequently, China will have to balance again. This will create a security dilemma in the region. The region will descend into competition, which may give rise to increasing incidents of confrontation. The stability of the region, previously maintained through the status quo power equation, is at stake.

⁵⁵ "What is Malabar Military Drill and Why It Concerns China," *Times of India*, October 20, 2020, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/>

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Way Forward

- The 21st century, unlike the 20th century, is a century of globalization, which indicates that diplomatic solutions are sought for disputes and tensions on win-win basis. The Quad members can avoid the Cold War mentality of forging alliances and may cooperate with China to cement the canon of globalization.
- The United States, a liberal state, is going against its own Bretton Woods System (1944) imposing trade sanctions on China. The US being a lawmaker should not be a lawbreaker and should promote the doctrine of a win-win situation. The US leadership in the world is in question, given its lack of will and ability to resolve the issues with the rising Chinese power.
- Quad members as well as China ought to avoid seeing their foreign policies merely through the prism of realism theory. Instead, they are required to implement the context of the theory of complex interdependence that believe in an anarchic environment better economic ties among states will create the possibility of enhancement of economic interdependence; resulting in mutually dependent vulnerability to each other actions. Although such interdependence may also entail asymmetry of power, where some powers especially China, may wield more benefits from this interdependence.
- Forging alliances by Quad members alluding to countering China will have a long-lasting implication for the world's economy. Cooperation instead of alliances is the need of the hour to cement the world's economic growth that has already been halted by Covid-19. The world needs to recover from the recession caused by Covid-19. This means that there is now a greater need for cooperation among all the powers. The pandemic has proved that global challenges need a global response. No country alone can deal with such pandemics. It is unfortunate to witness the information warfare between the US and China when the pandemic broke out in China. Instead of cooperation, both the countries saw it as an opportunity for political point scoring and information warfare against each other.
- At the current juncture, the world is economically more dependent on China than the US. The containment of China and slowing down its economic growth will also slow down the world's economic growth that will affect the Quad members too. The US has more trade with China than it has with India or other Quad members. The same goes for other countries. Any disturbance in the dependence or interdependence with China will affect the global economy and will push the world into an economic crisis. Interestingly, Quad countries are economically more dependent on

China than vice versa. Containment of China, thus, does not serve the national interest of Quad members.

- Threat perception is a socially constructed phenomenon; China being perceived as a threat by Quad countries can be deconstructed as a vital ally and partner in international politics.

Conclusion

The revival of the Quad in 2017 is changing the geo-political and geo-economic complexions of the Indo-Pacific region. Quad members believe in the consolidation of democracy and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) concept. It is an open secret now that the US through Quad desires to contain China and persuade its allies to be united under the umbrella of Quad and slow down China's economic growth. As far as Quad is concerned, China has been posing an existential threat to their so-called democracies. The Quad members are unhappy with China on account of its authoritarian regime, debt trap policy under BRI, human rights violations in China, and its labour exploitation in African states, perceiving its governing system as antithetical to their democratic values. However, China has termed the Quad as Asian NATO in the Indo-Pacific region. Malabar Naval Exercises are China-centric and disrupts its submarine activities in South China and East China seas. It is more worrisome that, the US under the Trump administration has launched nearly 14 Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) against China in the South China Sea.

The US is in a deep quandary assuming that it may be replaced by an emerging power China. The US cannot wage a direct war against China alone to weaken the latter; the former would ally to obtain its primary objectives. It can easily be forecasted that the foundation of Quad and its activities of carrying out Malabar Naval Exercises, will incite a confrontation in the region. China's String of Pearls strategy is regarded by Quad members as an existential threat to their national interests in the oceans across the world. It is worrisome to note that international politics first-time witnesses a block of democracies having the sole objective of targeting a specific country.

In the prevailing circumstances, the world order is obviously divided into two blocks, underpinned by the US and China. The US alone is unable to contain China on the pretext of promotion of democracy; with the support of Quad, the US will put Beijing in hot waters. US strained relations with China due to the prevailing trade war, South China Sea conundrum, coronavirus fallout, human rights issue in Xinjiang, the crackdoawn in Hong Kong, Taiwan crisis, intellectual property theft, press freedoms, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) race will further intensify their hostility. In the final analysis, the formation of Quad carrying out Malabar exercises by showcasing

aggressive postures will create instability and a likelihood of a destructive war.

