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- The Abraham Accords: New Strategic Planning or Hidden Agenda for West Asia?  
*Anu Sharma*
- Analysing the Myanmar Elections and Its Implications for Security in South Asia  
*Rohan Khattar Singh*
- The Asian Model of Development Cooperation: Examining Practices of China, Japan and South Korea  
*Urmi Tat*
- Techniques and Tactics of the Islamic State  
*Saurav Sarkar*
- Assessing the Increasing Appeal of Nuclear Energy  
*Zoya Akhter Fathima*
- Ex MALABAR 2020: Implications for India-Australia Ties  
*Rishi Athreya*
- EU's Soft Power: Power, Or No Power?  
*Khatu Jayesh Jayprakash*

# EX MALABAR 2020: IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA-AUSTRALIA TIES

RISHI ATHREYA

## INTRODUCTION

The recent participation by Australia in the Indian Navy's Ex MALABAR once again brings into focus the significance of the *Quad* and the concept of the *Indo-Pacific*.<sup>1</sup> It also highlights India's role as a regional power in the Indo-Pacific. The significance of *Maritime Diplomacy* as a tool of power projection is also in focus. As can be extrapolated from the statements of both India and Australia, it is a seminal moment in their bilateral relations. *Military Diplomacy* is in evidence by all three services of the Indian Armed Forces. Of these, the Indian Navy has been the most active. The two main aims are increasing cooperation and signalling intent to rivals.<sup>2</sup>

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Mr. **Rishi Athreya** is a Public Sector and Political-Risk Consultant.

1. Australian Government, Department of Defence, "Australia joins Exercise MALABAR 2020", <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/lreynolds/media-releases/australia-joins-exercise-malabar-2020>. *Navy Daily*, "Enduring partnerships provide the edge", <https://news.navy.gov.au/en/Nov2020/Fleet/6114/Enduring-partnerships-provide-the-edge.htm>. Accessed on January 5, 2021.
2. R. Athreya, "Maritime Diplomacy furthering India's Maritime Aspirations in IOR", in P. Chauhan, R. S. Vasani and R. Athreya (eds.), *Securing India's Maritime Neighbourhood: Challenges and Opportunities* (New Delhi: National Maritime Foundation and Vij Books, 2020), p. 60.

## INDO-PACIFIC CONCEPT

Since around 2006, the term Indo-Pacific has been used to describe the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean Region. Different countries have different strategic boundaries and conceptualisation of the 'Indo-Pacific' that are not identical to one another. As far as India is concerned, Prime Minister Modi has unequivocally described the Indo-Pacific as ranging "from the shores of Africa to the shores of the Americas".<sup>3</sup> This was endorsed at the East Asia Summit (EAS) 2019 where the Indian Prime Minister mentioned the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative.<sup>4</sup> In the current discourse the Indo-Pacific is the template of analysis for Indian security and foreign policy.<sup>5</sup>

Given that many important SLOCs and ISL that are crucial for India run through the Indo-Pacific, it is seen as India's natural habitat and maritime domain. India's maritime domain extends across the Indian Ocean right until the Western and South Pacific Seas.<sup>6,7</sup> Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan gives a comprehensive list of India's Maritime Neighbourhood. These are categorised as Immediate, Proximate, Extended and Strategic Neighbourhood.<sup>8</sup>

The Indian Navy and Coast Guard carry out patrolling within India's Exclusive Economic Zone.<sup>9</sup> The Indian Navy, however, goes even beyond these limits to patrol a larger area.

In pursuit of maritime strategic imperatives, there are various traditional and non-traditional threats. India has embarked on

3. Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, Media Centre, Speeches and Statements. Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue, June 1, 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime+Ministers+Keynote+Address+at+Shangri+La+Dialogue+June+01+2018>. Accessed on January 5, 2021.
4. Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, Transcript of Media Briefing by Secretary (East) during PM's visit to Thailand, [https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/32007/Transcript\\_of\\_Media\\_Briefing\\_by\\_Secretary\\_East\\_during\\_PMs\\_visit\\_to\\_Thailand\\_November\\_04\\_2019](https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/32007/Transcript_of_Media_Briefing_by_Secretary_East_during_PMs_visit_to_Thailand_November_04_2019). Accessed on January 5, 2021.
5. D. Scott, "India and the Indo-Pacific Discourse", in H. V. Pant (ed.), *New Directions in India's Foreign Policy* (Cambridge University Press, Kindle Edition), p. 196.
6. Indian Navy, 2016, pp. 31-33.
7. S. S. Parmar, "Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean: An Indian Perspective", *Journal of Defence Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1, January-March 2014, pp. 49-63.
8. P. Chauhan, "Foreword", in P. Chauhan, R. S. Vasana and R. Athreya (eds.), *Securing India's Maritime Neighbourhood: Challenges and Opportunities* (New Delhi: National Maritime Foundation and Vij Books, 2020).
9. R. S. Vasana, "Indian Navy's 'CAMPING' Expeditions in the Indian Ocean Region", National Maritime Foundation, 2018.

*Maritime Diplomacy*, informed by conceptual principles of *Security and Growth for all in the Region (SAGAR)*.<sup>10</sup> Much of India's foreign policy is seen in the context of two major nuclear armed neighbours, China and Pakistan. India has border issues with both these countries and has fought wars with both. There are continued tensions on both fronts. The recent Galwan incident once again brought into focus the tensions between India and China.<sup>11</sup>

## THE QUAD

The first meeting of the Quad, or the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, was held in 2007. It consisted of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States of America. No issue is as divisive as that of the Quad. On the one hand, it is seen as an effective counterweight to China.<sup>12</sup> Conversely, it is also considered to be stillborn.<sup>13</sup> Some Indian scholars believe that the Quad is essential to contain China.<sup>14</sup>

At a political level, the Quad was first experimented with in 2007. Since 1992, the Indian and US navies have carried out various editions of the MALABAR series of exercises.<sup>15</sup> Australia had participated in this exercise in 2007. However, Australia withdrew under Chinese pressure. Australia has long been keen to rejoin the exercise.

This has earlier been resisted by India due to the perceived closeness of Australia to China.<sup>16</sup> There has long been a question of whether Australia should participate in this grouping. The current dispensation in Australia is favourable towards the Quad.<sup>17</sup> Australia

10. R. Athreya, n. 2.

11. R. Athreya, *Galwan Incident: Larger Implications for Sino-India Relations*, ACB Issue Brief, June 28, 2020.

12. G. S. Khurana, "The 'Indo-Pacific' Idea: Origins, Conceptualizations and the Way Ahead", *Journal of Indian Ocean Rim Studies*, October-December 2019.

13. P. Chauhan, "The Security Dimension in the Indo-Pacific: Military-Strategic Issues", pp. 133-50, in National Maritime Foundation, "Indo-Pacific Partnership: Realising the Benefits of Economic and Maritime Cooperation", Indo-Pacific Report, 2019.

14. V. Kaura, "Incorporating Indo-Pacific and the Quadrilateral into India's Strategic Outlook", *Maritime Affairs*, pp. 78-102.

15. US Embassy, "U.S., JMSDF and Indian Naval Forces Conclude Malabar 2018", Release #032-18, <https://in.usembassy.gov/u-s-jmsdf-and-indian-naval-forces-conclude-malabar-2018/>. Accessed on January 7, 2021.

16. A. Singh, "India remains cautious about the 'quad'", 2017, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/india-remains-cautious-about-quad>. Accessed on January 7, 2021.

17. L. Lee, "Abe's Democratic Security Diamond and New Quadrilateral Initiative: An Australian Perspective", *The Journal of East Asian Affairs*, vol. 30, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2016), pp. 1-41.

is keen to support US presence in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>18</sup> There has also been increased bilateral engagement with Japan,<sup>19</sup> and there is a Trilateral Security Dialogue in place between the three countries.<sup>20</sup>

The 2020 exercise was planned for mid-November. Australia had been invited to participate.<sup>21</sup> Australia, in a statement, has held that this is a step to increase cooperation with the four navies.<sup>22</sup> The recent successful conduct of this exercise points to increased cooperation.

On October 6, 2020 the Quad Foreign Ministers held a meeting at Tokyo. Australia in a statement used the word *Quad*;<sup>23</sup> however, this word was not used by India.<sup>24</sup> Among the topics discussed were COVID-19, Indo-Pacific, maritime security, ASEAN, UNCLOS, cybersecurity, and humanitarian assistance.<sup>25</sup>

Given the existing close ties of India with Japan and the USA, there is a natural logic for Australia to also align with India. However, Indo-Australian ties remain the weakest of all bilateral relationships.<sup>26</sup>

There was a view that an upgradation of the Quad with more political content to the mechanism provided by participation of political leaders at the highest level may not be very likely soon. Some scholars believe that the most viable alternative on the security front are the East Asia Summit (EAS), along with the ADMM-Plus mechanism.<sup>27</sup> There is, however, not much progress at ADMM-Plus given the hostility by the Chinese. There is, however, a possibility of

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18. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

21. Government of India, Malabar 2020 Naval Exercise, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetailm.aspx?PRID=1665830>. Accessed on January 7, 2021.

22. Australian Government, Department of Defence, "Australia to participate in Exercise Malabar 2020", <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/lreynolds/media-releases/australia-participate-exercise-malabar-2020>. Accessed on January 7, 2021.

23. Minister for Foreign Affairs, Commonwealth of Australia, Australia-India-Japan-United States Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting, October 6, 2020, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/australia-india-japan- united-states-quad-foreign-ministers-meeting>. Accessed on January 7, 2021.

24. Ministry of External Affairs, 2nd India-Australia-Japan-USA Ministerial Meeting, [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33098/2nd\\_IndiaAustraliaJapan\\_USA\\_Ministerial\\_Meeting](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33098/2nd_IndiaAustraliaJapan_USA_Ministerial_Meeting). Accessed on January 7, 2021.

25. Minister for Foreign Affairs, Commonwealth of Australia, n. 24.

26. L. Lee, n. 17, p. 25.

27. U. B. Singh, "Significance of India's Act East Policy and Engagement with ASEAN", IDSA, 2018.

there being some cooperation among Quad members.<sup>28</sup> In this context Ex MALABAR 2020 exercise becomes important.

**HADR:** The origins of the Quad are seen in the Tsunami Core Group of Australia, India, Japan, and USA formed in 2004 to provide Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR).<sup>29</sup> Some Australian scholars believe that Australia could take a leadership role in the Quad.<sup>30</sup> India too can potentially use HADR to improve alliances with the Quad nations.<sup>31</sup> Japanese scholars believe that cooperation with ASEAN is important in providing HADR. They too see a role for the Quad.<sup>32</sup>

The USA could also build humanitarian relief into the Quad agenda.<sup>33</sup> There are also concerns around poor coordination. India has been reluctant to shed autonomy and join any grouping. Further, it was not keen on inviting Australia to Ex MALABAR. India has also had limited contribution to HADR activities.<sup>34</sup>

**ASEAN:** The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) is the main regional body in South East Asia, and the primary platform of collaboration. India puts ASEAN at the centre of the Indo-Pacific.<sup>35</sup> India and ASEAN are natural partners in their desire to create a free and inclusive regional architecture. The ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) is the highest defence consultative and cooperative mechanism in ASEAN. They are active participants in

28. A. Rai, "Quadrilateral Security Dialogue 2 (Quad 2.0)—A Credible Construct or Mere 'Foam in the Ocean'", *Maritime Affairs*, vol. 14, no. 2, p. 146.

29. K. Stevenson and H. D. P. Envall, "The 'Quad' and Disaster Management: An Australian Perspective", in Yuki Tatsumi and Jason Li (eds.), *International Disaster Response Rebuilding the Quad?* (Stimson Centre, 2019), p. 14.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

31. A. Vasudeva, "India's role in Disaster Management: Can it give the Quad a leg up?", in Yuki Tatsumi and Jason Li (eds.), *International Disaster Response Rebuilding the Quad?* (Stimson Centre, 2019), pp. 25-35.

32. Y. Jibiki, "A Japanese Perspective on Exploring Quad Cooperation in Disaster Management: The Isolation of India and Distance to ASEAN", in Yuki Tatsumi and Jason Li (eds.), *International Disaster Response Rebuilding the Quad?* (Stimson Centre, 2019), pp. 35-46.

33. P. Kennedy, "The U.S. and Quad Disaster Cooperation: A Matter of Political Will", in Yuki Tatsumi and Jason Li (eds.), *International Disaster Response Rebuilding the Quad?* (Stimson Centre, 2019), pp. 47-60.

34. Yuki Tatsumi and Jason Li, "Final Thoughts", in Yuki Tatsumi and Jason Li (eds.), *International Disaster Response Rebuilding the Quad?* (Stimson Centre, 2019), pp. 61-62.

35. V. Anand, "India's Defence Cooperation with South East Asian Countries: Need for Proactive and Substantive Action", Vivekananda International Foundation, 2019, p. 5.

the East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus), and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF).<sup>36</sup> All four countries of the Quad are members of ADMM-Plus.

In June 2019, the *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific* was adopted by member states at the 34th ASEAN Summit at Bangkok. This is the major policy document laying out the collective foreign policy of ASEAN. It is meant to contribute to the maintenance of peace, freedom, and prosperity.<sup>37</sup> ASEAN would like to be at the centre of the Indo-Pacific narrative.<sup>38</sup> There is a deep desire in ASEAN to avoid taking sides in any Sino-Indian "Cold War".<sup>39</sup>

An important aspect is that the document says it is keen to avoid zero sum games due to rivalry. This can be seen as implying neutrality between US and China.<sup>40</sup>

It is the keenness to strengthen other ASEAN-led regional mechanisms as aforementioned.<sup>41</sup> ASEAN is strongly against the creation of a new military alliance in its region.

Even Australia may prefer the Quad to remain an informal grouping.<sup>42</sup> Given that India considers ASEAN central to the Act East policy, any association with the Quad can only be with ASEAN cooperation.<sup>43</sup> here is little chance of the Quad emerging into an *Asian NATO*. Dr. David Brewster suggests a Quad of Coast Guards that would maintain maritime security and enhance

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36. H. V. Pant and A. Deb, "India-ASEAN Partnership at 25", ORF Issue Brief No. 189, July 2017, p. 3.

37. ASEAN Secretariat, "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific", <https://asean.org/asean-outlook-indo-pacific/>. Accessed on January 7, 2021.

38. Kaura, n. 14, p. 84.

39. D. Brewster, "Between Giants: The Sino-Indian Cold War in the Indian Ocean", *Asia Visions*, no. 103, December 2018.

40. M. C. Tyler, "The Indo-Pacific is the New Asia", *Lowy Interpreter*, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/indo-pacific-new-asia>. Accessed on January 7, 2021.

41. Comde S. Banerjee, "ASEAN Adopts Outlook for Indo-Pacific 2019: Balances Aspirations and Affirms Indonesia's Leadership", Vivekananda International Foundation, July 2019, <https://www.vifindia.org/2019/july/01/asean-adopts-outlook-for-indo-pacific-2019>. Accessed on January 7, 2021.

42. L. Lee, n. 17, pp. 30-32.

43. P. Saha, "The Quad in the Indo-Pacific: Why ASEAN Remains Cautious", ORF Issue Brief No. 229, February 2018. Rahul Roy-Chaudhury and Kate Sullivan de Estrada, "India, the Indo-Pacific and the Quad", *Survival*, vol. 60, no. 3 (June-July 2018), pp. 181-89.

cooperation, especially for non-traditional threats. This is seen as less confrontational than Navies.<sup>44</sup>

For the Quad to succeed there would need to be cooperation with ASEAN. Any concerns around domination of the region need to be addressed. Given that China is also part of ADMM-Plus this forum becomes especially important. Other ASEAN states would also need to be involved.

### INDIA-AUSTRALIA TIES

Australia remains a nation with which India has one of the most important—albeit complicated—bilateral relations. The Modi government is seen by Australia as initiating a strategic alliance between the two countries. The military, diplomatic, constabulary, and benign roles of the navy are seen as important in the alliance.<sup>45</sup>

Australia considers the AUSINDEX exercise held with India since 2015 an important event.<sup>46</sup> Ex AUSINDEX is seen as a watershed in improving bilateral relations of the two *Middle Powers*.<sup>47</sup> It is believed that India and Australia share a concern about China.<sup>48</sup> This contrasts with the earlier position wherein Australia was not keen to alienate China.<sup>49</sup>

India and Australia held a virtual bilateral summit and renewed their commitment to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. There were agreements to collaborate in the Indo-Pacific. The two countries mentioned a *Free, Open, Inclusive, and Rules-based Indo-Pacific* with multilateral structures. Specifically, for COVID-19 there are to be continued consultations with Quad

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44. D. Brewster, "It's time for a 'Quad' of Coast Guards", *Lowy Interpreter*, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/time-quad-coast-guards>. Accessed on January 7, 2021.

45. D. Brewster, "The Australia-India Framework for Security Cooperation: Another Step towards an Indo-Pacific Security Partnership", *Security Challenges*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2015), pp. 39-48.

46. Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Defence, 2016, Defence White Paper, Para 5.70.

47. R. Garge, "AUSINDEX—Mid-power bonhomie in the Indo-Pacific", *Australian Journal of Maritime & Ocean Affairs*, 2016.

48. A. Singh, "China's strategic ambitions seen in the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka", ORF, July 2018, p. 11, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/chinas-strategic-ambitions-seen-in-the-hambantota-port-in-sri-lanka/> Accessed on January 10, 2021.

49. M. H. C. Tyler and A. Bhutoria, "Diverging Australian and Indian Views on the Indo-Pacific", *Strategic Analysis*, 39:3, 2015, pp. 225-36.

plus South Korea, Vietnam and New Zealand.<sup>50</sup> These are ASEAN and ADMM-Plus countries.

Significantly, there is a separate Maritime agreement. This includes a mention of traditional and non-traditional threats to Maritime Security incorporating ecology, transportation, and connectivity.

Particularly, it is mentioned that there will be Navy-to-Navy, and Coast Guard cooperation. India's Indo-Pacific Initiative has been endorsed. This includes environmental and humanitarian issues thereby implying a joint benign role for maritime forces of both countries.<sup>51</sup>

Australia, in the latest Foreign Policy White Paper,<sup>52</sup> and Defence White Papers<sup>53</sup> lays out the policy on diplomacy and defence. This supports the US-led global order.<sup>54</sup>

Australia believes that it will play a positive role in the larger Indo-Pacific and EAS. While giving primacy to Japan and USA, it is keen to engage India with the EAS as also with the USA and East Asia.<sup>55</sup> Australia is keen to be a mediator between India and the rest of the EAS and ADMM-Plus groupings. India is considered a major defence player, and key to regional stability.<sup>56</sup> The role of India in IORA is noted.<sup>57</sup> India has long had an association with the IORA.<sup>58</sup> This feeds into SAGAR.<sup>59</sup>

Partnership and military diplomacy with India are considered important.<sup>60</sup> In the maritime sphere Australia is keen for joint

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50. Joint Statement on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Republic of India and Australia, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/india/Pages/joint-statement-comprehensive-strategic-partnership-between-republic-india-and-australia>. Accessed on January 10, 2021.

51. Joint Declaration on a Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific between the Republic of India and the Government of Australia, [https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/32730/Joint\\_Declaration\\_on\\_a\\_Shared\\_Vision\\_for\\_Maritime\\_Cooperation\\_in\\_the\\_IndoPacific\\_Between\\_the\\_Republic\\_of\\_India\\_and\\_the\\_Government\\_of\\_Australia](https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/32730/Joint_Declaration_on_a_Shared_Vision_for_Maritime_Cooperation_in_the_IndoPacific_Between_the_Republic_of_India_and_the_Government_of_Australia). Accessed on January 7, 2021.

52. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Commonwealth of Australia, 2017, Foreign Policy White Paper.

53. Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Defence, 2016, Defence White Paper.

54. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, n. 52, p. 7.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

56. Commonwealth of Australia, n. 53, Para 2.94.

57. *Ibid.*, Para 2.93.

58. G. S. Khurana, n. 12.

59. G. Padmaja, "Revisiting 'SAGAR'—India's Template for Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region", National Maritime Foundation, 2018.

60. Commonwealth of Australia, n. 53, Para 5.70.

exercises and building maritime domain awareness with India.<sup>61</sup> The role of India's Act East Policy and membership of ADMM-Plus and EAS are mentioned as platforms for cooperation.<sup>62</sup>

Pakistan is seen as an unstable country that generates terrorism. Australia, however, wants to continue to engage with Pakistan in defence cooperation and counterterrorism.<sup>63</sup> There is cooperation on border security, counterterror and transnational crime between the two countries.<sup>64</sup>

In July 2020 Australia released a *Defence Strategic Update*.<sup>65</sup> This document highlights strategic competition between the USA and China.<sup>66</sup> There is also a mention of *grey-zone* activity that may be used to coerce countries without actual war.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps for the first time there is a mention of a possible conventional attack on Australia.<sup>68</sup> There is, interestingly, a mention of US nuclear umbrella affording protection to Australia, while also saying that Australia needs to become more self-reliant.<sup>69</sup> In the Strategic Update 2020, while there is an endorsement of continued cooperation with the USA,<sup>70</sup> there is also a mention of India, Indonesia and Japan.<sup>71</sup>

**China Factor:** As noted, Australia had in the past withdrawn from the MALABAR exercise. This was since it did not want to be seen as openly anti-China.<sup>72</sup> There is a view that Australia is effectively a *Regional Power* in the South Pacific, and should take an active role in maintaining regional stability. Thus, it would prefer to neither be singularly pro-US or pro-China.<sup>73</sup> There has been a deterioration of relations between Australia and China over the past few years.

61. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, n. 52, p. 46. D. Brewster, "Give light, and the darkness will disappear: Australia's quest for maritime domain awareness in the Indian Ocean", *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, 2018, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 296-314.

62. Commonwealth of Australia, n. 53, Para 5.71.

63. *Ibid.*, Para 2.95-2.96.

64. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pakistan/Pages/pakistan-country-brief>. Accessed on January 7, 2021.

65. Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Defence, 2020, *Defence Strategic Update*.

66. Commonwealth of Australia, 2020, Para 1.2.

67. *Ibid.*, Para 1.5.

68. *Ibid.*, Para 1.11.

69. *Ibid.*, Para 2.22.

70. *Ibid.*, Para 2.17.

71. *Ibid.*, Para 2.18.

72. V. Kaura, n. 14, p. 82.

73. A. Carr, "No longer a Middle-power, Australia's Strategy in the 21st Century", *Focus Strategique*, no. 92, IFRI.

Australia was among the first countries to ban Huawei in 5G Broadband. However, in 2012, the company had already been banned from participating in Australia's broadband network.<sup>74</sup>

There is also tension between Australia and China on the trade front.<sup>75</sup> Overall, Australia is seen by India as a country that has been able to stand up to China.<sup>76</sup>

### OTHER QUAD MEMBERS

There is also a significant role of the other Quad members in any evolving cooperation in the Quad.

**Japan:** Japan has long been an important extra-regional ally of India. Given a pacifist doctrine, Japan has hitherto mainly had a coast guard to counter piracy. There is cooperation with the Indian Coast Guard and Navy.<sup>77</sup> Two major events are the Ex Sahyog-Kaijin and Ex JIMEX. In response to China's Belt and Road Initiative, Japan has pursued the Partnership for Quality Infrastructure and *Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy*. India, the USA and Australia are considered important partners.<sup>78</sup> There has been joint assistance and technical cooperation in South Asia. Both countries have cooperation in defence and diplomacy, including maritime affairs. They are part of ASEAN and EAS.<sup>79</sup>

**USA:** India and the US are apparently moving closer diplomatically and militarily. In 2015, India and the USA signed US-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region. Among other things it affirms the importance of maritime

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74. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australia-and-the-great-huawei-debate-risks-transparency-and-trust/>. Accessed on January 10, 2021.

75. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-end-of-australias-china-boom-shouldnt-be-such-a-surprise/>. Accessed on January 10, 2021.

76. Bachhawat, "Australia-India relations after Covid-19", in M. Shoebridge, and L. Sharland (eds.), *After Covid-19: Australia, the Region and Multilateralism*, vol. 2, p. 58.

77. S. L. D. Iyer, "Japanese Naval Diplomacy in the Indian Ocean: Prospects and Possibilities", NMF, 2018.

78. Y. Ishida, "China's OBOR Initiative and Japan's Response: The Abe Doctrine, Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy and Japan-India Strategic Partnership", in J. Panda and T. Basu (eds.), *China-India-Japan in the Indo-Pacific* (New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 2015), pp. 159-89.

79. Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, "Joint Statement—First India-Japan 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Meeting", [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/32131/Joint\\_Statement\\_First\\_IndiaJapan\\_2432\\_Foreign\\_and\\_Defence\\_Ministerial\\_Meeting](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/32131/Joint_Statement_First_IndiaJapan_2432_Foreign_and_Defence_Ministerial_Meeting). Accessed on January 10, 2021.

security and Freedom of Navigation, especially in the South China Sea. It also calls on parties to settle disputes through international law. There are also concerns about piracy, terrorism, and weapons of mass destruction.<sup>80</sup> There has been the LEMOA Agreement<sup>81</sup> to use each other's facilities. COMCASA has given India access to the USA's surveillance data.<sup>82</sup>

The USA, in the *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report*, mentions the relevance of *Free and Open Indo-Pacific*. This includes governance, peace, diplomacy, economics, and security.<sup>83</sup> The USA counts many ADMM-Plus countries as allies. Of these, Australia, Japan and South Korea are considered major allies.<sup>84</sup> India has been named as a major defence partner. There is a mention of collaboration, including a planned tri-service exercise.<sup>85</sup> The US considers ASEAN, ARF, ADMM and EAS as important fora.<sup>86</sup> There is a specific mention of the Quad.<sup>87</sup>

India and the US hold bilateral 2+2 meetings of the Foreign and Defence Ministers.<sup>88</sup> The latest two meetings endorsed India's position in the Indo-Pacific. It also supported naval cooperation and the Quad dialogue. There is endorsement for Rule of Law and Code of Conduct for South China Sea.<sup>89</sup> The 2020 communique also supports developmental activities, disaster relief and peacekeeping

80. Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, "US-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region", [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/24728/USIndia\\_Joint\\_Strategic\\_Vision\\_for\\_the\\_AsiaPacific\\_and\\_Indian\\_Ocean\\_Region](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/24728/USIndia_Joint_Strategic_Vision_for_the_AsiaPacific_and_Indian_Ocean_Region). Accessed on January 10, 2021.

81. Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement.

82. Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement.

83. United States of America, Department of Defense, "Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region", June 1, 2019, p. 3.

84. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-27.

85. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

86. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

88. R. Verma and S. Saran, *Strategic Convergence: The United States and India as Major Defence Partners* (New Delhi: ORF and Asia Group, 2019).

89. Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, "Joint Statement on the Second India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue", <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/32227/Joint+Statement+on+the+Second+IndiaUS+2432+Ministerial+Dialogue>. Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, Joint Statement on the Second India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, 2020, <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/33145/Joint+Statement+on+the+third+IndiaUS+2432+Ministerial+Dialogue>. Accessed on January 11, 2021.

in Indo-Pacific partner countries.<sup>90</sup> The two countries have signed the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) which facilitates maritime information sharing and maritime domain awareness. There is also a plan for greater defence cooperation.<sup>91</sup>

### STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

Both India and Australia have, to different extents, some concept of autonomy in security and diplomacy. India has long maintained a position of Strategic Autonomy.<sup>92</sup> Experts see this position as a natural continuation of the erstwhile Non-Alignment.<sup>93</sup> Thus, while it may have issue-based cooperation, it will never join an alliance. Even Australia and Japan have fears about the viability of the US continuing to be a net-security provider.<sup>94</sup> There are divergences in the perception about the threat posed by China.<sup>95</sup> Chinese scholars view the entire concept of Indo-Pacific, especially the Quad, as being directed against China.<sup>96</sup> There is especially a sense that it is at the US' behest.<sup>97</sup>

The mutual threat of China is a major factor in the US-India cooperation. India, however, is wary of becoming a full-fledged US ally.<sup>98</sup> In the event of a US withdrawal from the Indo-Pacific it may

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90. Ibid.

91. US Department of State, "Joint Statement on the Third U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue", <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-the-third-u-s-india-22-ministerial-dialogue/>. Accessed on January 11, 2021.

92. Sunil Khilnani, Rajiv Kumar, Pratap Bhanu Mehta, Prakash Menon, Nandan Nilekani, Srinath Raghavan, Shyam Saran and Siddharth Varadarajan, "Non-Alignment 2.0: A Foreign and Strategic Policy for India in the Twenty-First Century", 2012.

93. C. V. Ranganathan, "India's Regional Alliances in the Indo-Pacific", in P. Chauhan, R. S. Vasani and R. Athreya (eds.), *Securing India's Maritime Neighbourhood: Challenges and Opportunities* (New Delhi: National Maritime Foundation and Vij Books, 2020), pp. 31-40.

94. Rahul Roy-Chaudhury and Kate Sullivan de Estrada, "India, the Indo-Pacific and the Quad", *Survival*, vol. 60, no. 3 (June-July 2018), pp. 181-94.

95. L. Lee, *Assessing the Quad: Prospects and Limitations of Quadrilateral Cooperation for Advancing Australia's Interests*, Lowy Institute, pp. 7-8.

96. Chengxin Pan, "The 'Indo-Pacific' and geopolitical anxieties about China's rise in the Asian regional order", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 68:4, 2014, pp. 453-69.

97. Z. Xiangyu, "The Indo-Pacific: China's Perception", in S. Chinoy and J. Panda (eds.), *Asia between Multipolarism and Multipolarity* (New Delhi: KW Publishers, 2020), p. 300.

98. Gurpreet S. Khurana, "High End in the Pacific: Envisioning the Upper Limits of India-US Naval Cooperation in Pacific-Asia", *Journal of Defence Studies*, vol. 11, no. 4, October-December 2017, pp. 51-71.

be expected that India would take the role of Net Security Provider.<sup>99</sup> An exceptional part of the interface is that India too is prevailing on the USA to work as a nominally equal partner.<sup>100</sup> India perhaps is moving in the direction of being a Net Security Coordinator.

Both India and Australia have also come to believe that the USA alone cannot counter China.<sup>101</sup> Thus, it is more likely that India would want 'coordinated' patrols rather than 'joint' operations with a unified command.<sup>102</sup> The MALABAR exercise has been undertaken along with the USA since 1992.<sup>103</sup> Japan has been part of this exercise since 2015.

There is a view that Australia is effectively a *Regional Power* in the South Pacific, and should take an active role in maintaining regional stability. Australia would need larger regional and global support to emerge as a middle power. There are, however, challenges of economic relations with China across the Indo-Pacific.<sup>104</sup> Thus, it may also explain why it was willing to continue Ex AUSINDEX with India even while earlier not being part of Ex MALABAR. One view is that Australia is keen to use multilateral bodies to moderate China.<sup>105</sup> Australia would prefer to use ASEAN institutions as opposed to the Quad to develop a shared view of the Indo-Pacific.<sup>106</sup>

There is, however, a counterview that Australia should balance Japan with China.<sup>107</sup> Australia and India may find convergence in their maritime defence policies.<sup>108</sup>

99. Khurana, n. 12, p. 60. V. Mishra, "India-US Maritime Cooperation: Crossing the Rubicon", *Maritime Affairs*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 15-25.

100. Brewster, "Australia, India and the United States: The Challenge of Forging New Alignments in the Indo-Pacific", United State Studies Centre, 2016, p. 7.

101. A. Bachhawat, n. 76, p. 56.

102. Gurpreet S. Khurana, "America's Expectation versus India's Expediency: India as a Regional 'Net Security Provider'", National Maritime Foundation, 2016.

103. <https://in.usembassy.gov/u-s-jmsdf-and-indian-naval-forces-conclude-malabar-2018/>. Accessed on January 11, 2021.

104. P. Layton, "Australia's Defence Strategic Update: It's All About China", RUSI Commentary, 2020, <https://rusi.org/commentary/australias-defence-strategic-update-it%E2%80%99s-all-about-china>. Accessed on January 11, 2021.

105. R. Medcalf, "Australia's Foreign Policy White Paper: Navigating Uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific", *Security Challenges*, vol. 14, no. 1, p. 37.

106. Kaura, n. 14, p. 92.

107. D. Brewster, "Japan's plans to build a 'Free and Open' Indian Ocean", <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/japan-plans-build-free-and-open-indian-ocean>. Accessed on January 11, 2021.

108. U. B. Singh, "Australia's 2016 Defence White Paper: An Indian Perspective", *Journal of Defence Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2, April-June 2016, pp. 111-20.

Overall, the Indo-Australian relationship has for some years been considered as having reached a balanced stage and there is scope for further cooperation.<sup>109</sup> Australia joining in this Exercise in 2020 is seen by some as a move towards formalisation of the Quad. Australia's participation in MALABAR 2020 is in some ways a fructification of the Quad.

At the diplomatic level, given the historic Commonwealth connection, India should enhance cooperation with Australia.<sup>110</sup> There is also support for India and Australia from the UK.<sup>111</sup> This too should be built up for further historic diplomatic and military ties. Australia's desire to engage with Pakistan can be seen as a natural progression of the role of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

#### **OTHER OFFICIAL FORA**

Besides the Quad, EAS, ASEAN and ADMM-Plus, several multilateral groupings exist that also affect the maritime domain. As with regional bodies these too need strengthening.

**IORA:** The Indian Ocean Rim Association<sup>112</sup> could be said to be the closest to a multilateral body for Indian's Maritime Neighbourhood.<sup>113</sup> There is a need for IORA to collaborate with many regional bodies in the Indo-Pacific. This includes the ADMM-Plus.<sup>114</sup> In this context, the EAS and ADMM would need to cooperate with IORA to be effective.<sup>115</sup> It can be said that the Indian Navy and Coast Guard are effective in promoting bilateral cooperation.

**IONS:**<sup>116</sup> The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), an Indian initiative established in 2008, which brings together 35 navies and

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109. I. Hall, "India in Australia's 2016 Defence White Paper", *Security Challenges*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2016, pp. 181-85.

110. C. V. Ranganathan, n. 93, p. 36.

111. J. Hemings, "Charting Britain's Moves in the South China Sea", *RUSI Commentary*, February 6, 2019, <https://rusi.org/commentary/charting-britain%E2%80%99s-moves-south-china-sea>. Accessed on January 14, 2021.

112. <https://dfat.gov.au/international-relations/regional-architecture/Pages/asean-regional-forum-arf.aspx> <https://www.iora.int/en>. Accessed on January 14, 2021.

113. G. S. Khurana, n. 12.

114. Yogendra Kumar and Probal K. Ghosh, "The "Indo" in the "Indo-Pacific"—An Indian View", *Naval War College Review*, vol. 73, no. 2, article 7, pp. 75-76.

115. G. S. Khurana, n. 12, p. 15.

116. <https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/node/21302>

coast guards, seeks to increase maritime cooperation among navies of the littoral countries of the Indian Ocean Region.<sup>117</sup>

**MILAN:** This is a biennial congregation of Indian Ocean Littoral navies conducted by Indian Navy at the Andaman and Nicobar Islands facilitating cooperation.<sup>118</sup> It has now grown into a prestigious international event and encompasses participation by maritime forces from not just the Bay of Bengal and South East Asia but the larger IOR. This includes some ADMM countries.

**Malacca Strait Security Initiative:** Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand launched the *Malsindo* coordinated patrols under the *Malacca Strait Security Initiative* (MSSI) in 2004. The success can be attributed to cooperation by all relevant stakeholders. This can be a template to engage not just China but all other stakeholders in Indian Ocean maritime security.<sup>119</sup> This includes ADMM countries. There is a lack of keenness to expand membership to include India. Nevertheless, India has been participating in benign roles.<sup>120</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The invitation by India to Ex MALABAR and the acceptance of this by Australia is a landmark not just for the two countries but the entire region represented by the Quad, ADMM-Plus and ASEAN. Effectively by extending the invitation India has shown the willingness to be net security coordinator if not an actual provider. Australia too has shown a reception of India in such a role.

From a pure maritime diplomacy angle India is effectively cooperating with partners like the Quad states, while signalling intent to the main rival China. China continues to be an enduring shared threat in the region. This is seen especially in the mention of Free and Open Indo-Pacific by all four Quad countries. ASEAN too broadly endorses this view. HADR will continue to play an important role in maritime diplomatic relations of the Quad countries. Non-traditional

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117.G. Padmaja, n. 59, p. 4.

118.Z. D. Singh (2017). "Foreign Policy and Sea Power: India's Maritime Role Flux". *Journal of Defence Studies*, 11(4), p. 34.

119.S. Upadhyaya (2018). "Maritime Security Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region: Assessment of India's Maritime Strategy to be the Regional 'Net Security Provider'", University of Wollongong, pp. 232-233.

120.V. Anand, n. 35, pp. 21-22.

threats continue to be a challenge in the region. In this context there may well be a role for Coast Guards, both in constabulary and benign functions. This is particularly relevant to Japan.

There is multiple security architecture in the region. ASEAN will continue to be an important body representing the better part of the region. All Quad members effectively want to honour these bodies at least in form. As can be seen this would clearly prevent the creation of an Asian NATO among Quad members. The Indo-Pacific will thus have to be a collaborative effort. All countries of the region and regional bodies will need to have a role and make their contribution.

India's long-term position of Strategic Autonomy continues to be in play. Thus, it is not too keen to necessarily be part of a US-led alliance. There is a view in Australia too that it should maintain neutrality between major powers, especially China and the USA. The USA by being willing to support an India-led maritime exercise is effectively accepting India's autonomous role even if only in form. Japan, notwithstanding the pacifist constitution, remains part of the Quad. It too supports the institutional architecture in the region.

Australia and India could build on their bilateral ties. Ex MALABAR shows that the two countries have much in common. Both countries as neutral middle powers have a role not just in the Quad but also in the larger Indo-Pacific. They would also need to collaborate with not just the USA and Japan but also all ADMM and ADMM-Plus states. The role of other official fora, namely IORA, IONS, MILAN and Malacca Straits Initiative is also important in this context.