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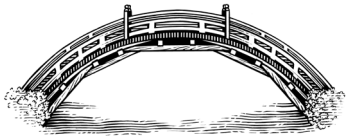
ROUNDTABLE

Minilateral Deterrence in the Indo-Pacific



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Minilaterals and Deterrence: A Critical New Nexus

Arzan Tarapore and Brendan Taylor

As countries around the Indo-Pacific strive to manage the challenges of China's growing power and assertiveness, they have emphasized two concepts. First, they have increasingly embraced "minilateral" groupings—small, issue-based, informal, and uninstitutionalized partnerships—as a way of coordinating international policy action. This trend has been building gradually for over two decades, ever since the emergence of mechanisms such as the U.S.-Japan-Korea Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group in the late 1990s and the U.S.-Australia-Japan Trilateral Strategic Dialogue during the early 2000s. But these groupings sharply expanded in number and ambition in the 2010s. The standard-bearer of the minilateral model is the Quad—comprising Australia, India, Japan, and the United States—which was resuscitated in 2017 and now involves regular summit-level meetings. The boldest minilateral is AUKUS, announced in 2021, which brings together already-close allies Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States to further deepen defense technology cooperation, including the provision of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia.

Second, the United States and its allies, such as Australia and Japan, have renewed their commitment to deterrence to maintain regional stability. Rather than relying on institutions to deepen regional integration, which was their preferred option after the end of the Cold War, they are designing defense policies to dissuade potential adversaries, especially China, from revisionist behavior. For example, "integrated deterrence" has been highlighted as the centerpiece of the Biden administration's emerging

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defense strategy.[1] Likewise, in its July 2020 Defence Strategic Update, Canberra committed to a new framework of "shaping, deterring and responding" to security threats.[2]

The main drivers of these trends are reasonably clear. First and foremost, the rise of minilateralism and the return of deterrence are responses to China's growing power and aggressiveness, seen on its shared border with India, in its so-called "gray-zone" tactics in the South and East China Seas, in its economic coercion of Australia, and in its growing military threat to Taiwan. These drivers also reflect the limited capacity of the two traditional pillars of regional architecture—the U.S.-led network of bilateral alliances and the multilateral groupings centered on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—to respond to China's growing strategic extroversion, along with other challenges to Indo-Pacific stability such as the North Korean nuclear and missile threat.

The Cold War produced a distinguished body of scholarship addressing the concept of deterrence.[3] There is also a burgeoning literature on minilateral security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.[4] Yet little, if any, work has thus far addressed the potential convergence between these two increasingly dominant trends in the region's security politics. By bringing together six leading security experts to explore the nexus between deterrence and minilateralism, this roundtable constitutes a first attempt to fill this gap.

Can Minilaterals Deter?

On their face, minilateral groupings such as the Quad or AUKUS offer promise to deter potential adversaries because they can create new ways of aggregating members' national power. In some cases—again, especially with the Quad and AUKUS—their mere existence sends a signal of members'

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1 Lloyd J. Austin (speech at the 40th International Institute for Strategic Studies Fullerton Lecture, Singapore, July 27, 2021) ~ https://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/2708192/secretary-of-defense-remarks-at-the-40th-international-institute-for-strategic.

2 Department of Defence (Australia), *2020 Defence Strategic Update* (Canberra, July 1, 2020) ~ https://www.defence.gov.au/about/publications/2020-defence-strategic-update.

3 See, for example, Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961); Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980); and Robert Jervis, "Deterrence Theory Revisited," *World Politics* 31, no. 2 (1979): 289–324.

4 See, for example, Bhubhindar Singh and Sarah Teo, eds., *Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific* (London: Routledge, 2020); and "Changing Alliance Structures," International Institute for Strategic Studies, December 2021 ~ https://www.iiss.org/blogs/research-paper/2021/12/changing-alliance-structures.

resolve that may shape potential adversaries' calculus. But creating deterrent effects in the minds of adversaries is notoriously both difficult to do and difficult to observe, and the very flexibility and informality of minilaterals that make them such an attractive form of partnership may complicate rather than facilitate efforts to deter.

The literature on deterrence is replete with discussions of the intricacies and challenges of deterring adversaries.[5] Three such challenges are particularly germane to the contemporary Indo-Pacific. First, any attempt to deter an adversary must also consider other audiences—including third-party countries and the deterrer's domestic population, especially in cases of democracies. Defense policy settings that are too aggressive may alienate potential partners; policies that are too accommodating may embolden potential adversaries; costly policies may generate domestic opposition; or strong declarations may tie leaders' hands to behave dangerously in crises. The deterrer must therefore craft its strategy in a way that weighs these competing imperatives. Second, deterrence relies on credible threats of inflicting costs on the adversary. The deterrent threat must therefore be believable, but once the threat is executed, the deterrer loses the leverage it once had. The deterrer must substantiate its threats with limited tangible actions that alter the military balance of power. Third, deterring a potential adversary requires taking some risk, which the deterrer is often unwilling to take. A potential adversary, especially a highly resolute one, will be willing to absorb some costs to achieve its objectives. The deterrer must therefore be willing to impose a sufficiently high degree of cost or uncertainty—that is, risk—that may derail the potential adversary's plans.

All of these traditional and universal challenges of deterrence are magnified when the deterrer is a collection of countries rather than a unitary actor. They are even further magnified in the case of a minilateral grouping that involves weaker commitments than a formal alliance.

First, and most obviously, the problem of multiple audiences is exacerbated by the need to coordinate multiple deterrer states. In the Quad, each member is thoroughly committed to a "free and open Indo-Pacific" as its policy goal. But even when all the involved states can agree on a slate of general interests—from freedom of navigation to collective humanitarian assistance—there is no guarantee that each member will have the same ordering of preferences, will seek to use the same tools and tactics to achieve those goals, or will keep

[5] For a useful overview on how and when deterrence can work, see Michael J. Mazarr, "Understanding Deterrence," RAND Corporation, 2018 ~ https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE295.html.

these preferences stable over time. Minilaterals, such as the Quad, which seek to win the approval or at least reduce the opposition of regional states, must not only coordinate among their members but also be sensitive to the policy preferences and concerns of nonmember countries. Thus, if the Quad were to seek to deter destabilizing behavior in the region, its agenda would need to shape its potential adversary's calculus and also synchronize across four states unaccustomed to coordinating strategic policies, not run afoul of their respective domestic constituencies, and accommodate many other regional states with entrenched preferences and processes.

Second, the problem of having credible coercive leverage is complicated for the Quad and AUKUS because they have each declared ambitious agendas. The Quad's first headline policy deliverable—providing one billion Covid-19 vaccine doses to regional countries—has been delayed and remains a work in progress. Observers have stressed the importance of delivering on promises to maintain credibility in the eyes of both potential adversaries and potential supporters. Critics may pointedly ask how the grouping could deter Chinese territorial revisionism if it cannot even distribute medical supplies in a permissive environment. Similarly, for AUKUS, the headline goal of delivering nuclear-powered submarines to Australia involves ponderous bureaucratic, industrial, and technological challenges for all members. At the same time, for both the Quad and AUKUS, the fuzzy and unbounded nature of their policy agendas may generate coercive leverage because potential adversaries remain uncertain over how these minilaterals' agendas may evolve. NATO's deterrent was always fixed and therefore predictable—to protect members' territory from armed attack—but the Quad and AUKUS, as minilaterals, do not have such clearly bounded missions. This uncertainty carries coercive potency—from an adversary's perspective, the situation could always get worse if the minilateral chooses to adopt bolder policy positions. But it also requires commensurate outcomes to maintain credibility.

Third, the challenge of changing an adversary's calculus is complicated in today's Indo-Pacific because China already has prodigious power in the region—much of it based on legitimate forms of presence and influence—and is highly resolved in its territorial disputes. Therefore, states seeking to deter destabilizing behavior by China must walk a fine line, seeking to alter Beijing's calculus on some strategic issues while not countering all Chinese activities in the region and not unduly harming their own or other regional states' economic interests. The United States and its allies and partners—and certainly other regional states—quite rationally

fear the consequences of conflict with China. For a minilateral grouping such as the Quad, members' national interests, and therefore appetite for risk, vary greatly across issues. Thus, while the Quad has quickly and starkly deepened its cooperation from strategic consultations to combined policy action after its summit meetings began in 2021, the task of collectively generating risk to deter Chinese strategic provocations would represent a qualitatively different level of cooperation yet to be seen.

Taken together, these factors suggest that minilaterals may be capable of creating deterrent effects in a potential adversary, but these groupings must operate in a strategically messier environment than the Cold War, when much of deterrence theory and policy emerged. Minilaterals are not as tightly bound as Cold War alliances such as NATO; the national goals of member states are not as clear as defending against conventional attack on their territory; and their primary potential adversary is far more powerful and integrated, making the necessary risk generation even more difficult.

Essays in This Roundtable

Given the apparent challenges of minilateral deterrence, the essays in this *Asia Policy* roundtable address the following central question: can minilateral groupings deter coercion and aggression in the Indo-Pacific and, if so, under what conditions?

The first two essays, by Oriana Skylar Mastro and Eric Sayers, address the "demand side" of this question, identifying the essential requirements of contemporary deterrence in the Indo-Pacific region and exploring the extent to which they challenge or amend traditional deterrence theories and practices. Mastro considers how minilateral groupings can best enhance deterrence through employing the traditional categories of "deterrence by punishment" and "deterrence by denial" and by adding a third, less analyzed category, "deterrence by resilience." Whereas discussions of deterrence in the Indo-Pacific typically take a medium- to longer-term perspective by focusing on the likely Chinese military challenge in 2035—when China aims officially to have completed modernizing its armed forces—Sayers explores the often underappreciated nearer-term need to deter Beijing from miscalculation, advocating in the process for a "strategy of distribution" and highlighting the supporting role of minilateral cooperation.

The next two essays switch to the "supply side" of the question by considering the role that minilaterals can play as security providers, including the types of political or military activities that they might

realistically perform. Kei Koga charts the evolution of minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific and identifies the emergence over the past half decade of more "strategic" forms of such security cooperation as a new trend. Evan Laksmana looks for lessons in the often overlooked history of Southeast Asian minilateralism, much of which has involved collaboration beyond the traditional security domain. But he remains skeptical that newer modes of Indo-Pacific minilateralism can generate deterrent effects, given the widespread suspicion these groupings are generating among Southeast Asian states.

The final two essays, by Ketian Zhang and Tanvi Madan, offer differing perspectives on the Quad as a case study in Indo-Pacific minilateralism. Zhang observes that the Quad has largely succeeded in deterring a worst-case scenario—major militarized conflict over China's territorial or maritime disputes. However, she finds that it has ultimately failed to deter coercion short of war because of three factors: a lack of clear signaling, excessive media exposure, and diverging interests among its members. Madan, by contrast, is more positive, maintaining that in practice the Quad can and does play a role as a security provider—not only through the Quad itself but also through "sub-Quad" cooperation (that is, bilaterals and trilaterals among members) and "supra-Quad" arrangements (that is, efforts also involving states outside the Quad).

Taken together, the essays in this roundtable highlight both the potential for and the limits to minilateral groupings as means for enhancing deterrence in the Indo-Pacific region. Perhaps most importantly, however, the essays also reveal a nexus between minilateralism and deterrence that is multidirectional, multidimensional, and worthy of further exploration by both scholars and practitioners of Indo-Pacific security. ◈

Deterrence in the Indo-Pacific

Oriana Skylar Mastro

As China's military might and tendency toward regional aggression grow, the United States and its allies are increasingly concerned with deterrence. Their strategies seek to prevent Beijing from disrupting the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific by, for example, invading Taiwan or conducting gray-zone operations in the South China Sea.

One of those strategies was to revive the Quad grouping with Australia, Japan, India, and the United States in 2017 to protect freedom of navigation and promote democratic values.[1] In the period since, the Quad has become implicitly—or explicitly, at least on the part of the United States—aimed at countering China's malign activities in the Indo-Pacific region.[2] Statements from the February 2022 Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting highlighted the threat of "unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force and coercion" in the South and East China Seas while also reaffirming the Quad's commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific.[3] Although the Quad has been reluctant to directly address security cooperation, the 2020 and 2021 joint military Malabar exercises revealed a shared focus on improving interoperability.[4]

Yet deterring China with minilateral groupings of states is more complex and difficult than traditional deterrence theory might suggest. This essay lays out some of the unique characteristics of the China challenge before considering how minilaterals can best enhance deterrence in these circumstances.

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1 Emma Chanlett-Avery, K. Alan Kronstadt, and Bruce Vaughn, "The 'Quad': Security Cooperation among the United States, Japan, India, and Australia," Congressional Research Service, CRS Report for Congress, IF11678, November 2, 2020 ~ https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/IF11678.pdf.

2 Ibid.

3 "The Fourth Japan-Australia-India-U.S. (Quad) Foreign Ministers' Meeting," Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), Press Release, February 11, 2022 ~ https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page6e_000274.html.

4 Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, "The Quad Conducts Malabar Naval Exercise," *Diplomat*, August 27, 2021 ~ https://thediplomat.com/2021/08/the-quad-conducts-malabar-naval-exercise.

Coalitions and Deterrence

States have long searched for allies to deter aggression against themselves. External balancing, alliance formation, and coalition building—while each having differing degrees of institutionalization—are ultimately geared toward aggregating capabilities across countries to improve military effectiveness and thus deterrence. Indeed, while the Quad leaders go to great lengths to argue that their efforts do not constitute a military coalition (interestingly, China makes the same efforts with respect to Russia), this is undoubtedly a part of the calculation. The Quad leaders obliquely expressed their desire to deter Chinese aggression in a March 2021 joint statement: "We strive for a region that is free, open, inclusive, healthy, anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion."[5] Mike Pompeo, then secretary of state, put it more bluntly when in October 2019 he claimed the Quad "will prove very important in the efforts ahead, ensuring that China retains only its proper place in the world."[6]

While the Quad has the potential to enhance deterrence against China, the reality is not as straightforward. From a simple correlation of forces perspective, the U.S. military is already superior to China's even without factoring in U.S. allies and partners. For example, the United States spent approximately $778 billion on defense in 2020, compared to China's estimated $252 billion.[7] The United States boasts over 13,000 military aircraft to China's 2,500.[8] Similarly, the United States leads significantly in aircraft carriers: it has eleven nuclear-powered aircraft carriers while China has two conventionally powered carriers.[9] Additionally, the United States has the unfortunate boasting rights of being involved in over one hundred foreign military interventions since 1947, while China has not fought a war since 1979 (and even then, its performance was widely considered a failure).

Because China is outmatched, since the mid-1990s, Beijing has focused on developing and implementing an anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD)

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5 "Quad Leaders' Joint Statement: 'The Spirit of the Quad,'" White House, Press Release, March 12, 2021 ~ https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/12/quad-leaders-joint-statement-the-spirit-of-the-quad.

6 Iain Henry, "Finally, Some Plain Talk on the Quad," Lowy Institute, Interpreter, October 25, 2019 ~ https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/finally-some-plain-talk-quad.

7 "World Military Spending Rises to Almost $2 Trillion in 2020," Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Press Release, April 26, 2021 ~ https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2021/world-military-spending-rises-almost-2-trillion-2020.

8 Ziyi Zhang, "U.S.-China Rivalry: Who Has the Stronger Military?" *South China Morning Post*, July 12, 2021 ~ https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3140681/us-china-rivalry-who-has-stronger-military.

9 Ibid.

strategy toward the United States.[10] Chinese strategists do not doubt the United States' military might, but they believe China can be victorious if Washington cannot mobilize and use that power in a timely manner in a conflict in the Indo-Pacific.[11] If U.S. forces are unable to operate from the region—either because countries are reluctant to grant access or because China takes out U.S. Pacific bases through missile strikes—then the relative balance of power becomes largely irrelevant. The United States currently does not have enough military assets close to potential Indo-Pacific flashpoints that are readily available to fight. It has 2 air bases within 1,000 kilometers of the Taiwan Strait, while China has 39 within 800 kilometers of Taipei.[12] It can take weeks, depending on availability, location, and readiness, for key assets such as submarines and aircraft carriers to be deployed to the area.[13] And the United States is unlikely to get much early warning, as improved Chinese jamming and spoofing abilities may compromise U.S. systems' effectiveness.[14]

Given these challenges, "adding" Indian, Japanese, or Australian forces would improve U.S. capabilities in two specific ways. First, in the initial stages of combat, while U.S. forces are still being deployed to the region, these countries' militaries could have a significant impact on the local power balance. For example, Japan has a significant military and is in close proximity to Taiwan—the southern island of Okinawa is only 740 kilometers away.[15] The Japan Self-Defense Force includes 114 warships, 412 aircraft, and approximately 100,000 navy and air force personnel.[16] Moreover, Japan's military is highly modernized: the Maritime Self-Defense Force fields light aircraft carriers and a growing submarine fleet, and the

10 Oriana Skylar Mastro, "China's Anti-Access-Area Denial (A2/AD) Capabilities: Is the Rebalancing Enough?" in *American Strategy and Purpose: Reflections on Foreign Policy and National Security in an Era of Change*, ed. William H. Natter III and Jason Brooks (Washington, D.C.: Council for Emerging National Security Affairs, 2014), 118–40.

11 Oriana Skylar Mastro, "The Taiwan Temptation: Why Beijing Might Resort to Force," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2021.

12 Eric Heginbotham et al., *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power, 1996–2017* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2015).

13 U.S. Navy, "Aircraft Carriers–CVN," November 12, 2021 ~ https://www.navy.mil/Resources/Fact-Files/Display-FactFiles/Article/2169795/aircraft-carriers-cvn.

14 Mastro, "The Taiwan Temptation."

15 David Sacks, "Enhancing U.S.-Japan Coordination for a Taiwan Conflict," Council on Foreign Relations, January 2022 ~ https://cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/Enhancing%20U.S.-Japan%20Coordination%20for%20a%20Taiwan%20Conflict_DP_1.pdf.

16 Kyle Mizokami, "Japan's Navy Is a Lot More Powerful Than You Realize," *National Interest*, July 15, 2021 ~ https://nationalinterest.org/blog/reboot/japans-navy-lot-more-powerful-you-realize-189542.

Air Self-Defense Force boasts world-class avionics, radars, and missiles.[17] Japan's involvement could prevent a *fait accompli*, thus reducing China's temporal and geographic advantages. Second, closer military collaboration through the Quad could increase the military access these countries grant the United States in both peacetime and wartime, which could undermine China's A2/AD efforts to a degree. In fact, under the terms of the AUKUS agreement between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, Australia will explore hosting U.S. bombers on its territory and consider supporting U.S. vessels at HMAS Stirling near Perth.[18] Third, these countries could engage in their own independent military operations in the broader region, thus allowing a greater consolidation of U.S. efforts at the main flashpoint. Australia is committed to maintaining stability in the north Indian Ocean and South China Sea and devotes resources to patrolling those regions.[19] Japan and China have competing claims in the East China Sea, most notably over the Senkaku Islands (known as the Diaoyu Islands in China), and a conflict could pull Chinese forces away from Taiwan. India can potentially threaten a two-front war that would divide Chinese forces' resources and efforts enough to deter Chinese aggression.

In other words, the political decisions and military activities of Japan, Australia, and India could facilitate an increased and dispersed U.S. capability within the first island chain. However, there is nothing about enhanced meetings, consultations, or even joint exercises that suggests these are the scenarios being developed. A joint statement issued in February 2022 tellingly excluded discussion of tangible military cooperation, focusing instead on diplomatic initiatives.[20] Furthermore, India has sought to maintain its policy of nonalignment and avoided committing to a military alliance with the United States or other Quad countries, despite recent lethal border disputes with China. If peacetime interactions do not hint at joint planning and execution, the hypothetical aggregation of capabilities will not significantly enhance deterrence against China.

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17 Mizokami, "Japan's Navy Is a Lot More Powerful Than You Realize"; and Charlie Gao, "Does Japan Have the Best Air Force in Asia?" *National Interest*, March 17, 2021 ~ https://nationalinterest.org/blog/reboot/does-japan-have-best-air-force-asia-180461.

18 Oriana Skylar Mastro and Zack Cooper, "In Defence of AUKUS," Lowy Institute, Interpreter, October 5, 2021 ~ https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/defence-aukus; and Adam Mount and Van Jackson, "Biden, You Should Be Aware That Your Submarine Deal Has Costs," *New York Times*, September 30, 2021 ~ https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/30/opinion/aukus-china-us-australia-competition.html.

19 Department of Defence (Australia), "Operation Gateway" ~ https://www.defence.gov.au/operations/gateway-south-china-sea-and-indian-ocean.

20 "Joint Statement on Quad Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific," U.S. Department of State, February 11, 2022 ~ https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-quad-cooperation-in-the-indo-pacific.

Types of Deterrence and Their Relative Effectiveness

Scholars and policymakers like to debate which type of deterrence is the most effective: deterrence by punishment or deterrence by denial. While each form relies on shaping an adversary's perceptions, deterrence by punishment rests on fear of repercussions, whereas deterrence by denial centers on making actions appear unlikely to succeed.[21]

Deterrence by punishment. Deterrence by punishment strategies employ the threat of severe penalties to prevent an adversary's attacks.[22] Penalties can range from economic sanctions to nuclear retaliation, and their effectiveness depends on how credible the adversary finds the threat. Deterrence by punishment through military means could be extremely difficult to implement against China for several reasons. First, China has more options for nonlethal but effective uses of force than, for example, the Soviet Union did during the Cold War—specifically, in cyberspace and outer space. Reportedly, China conducted a set of attacks against command and control links for NASA satellites between 2007 and 2009 and successfully achieved the ability to send commands to the satellites.[23] China also has electronic warfare capabilities to disrupt civilian satellite communications and has demonstrated its ability to jam and spoof Global Positioning System (GPS) signals.[24] In recent decades, the United States has become more reliant on space and cyberspace to project power, making even a nonlethal attack potentially devastating operationally. For example, during the Iraq War, the United States used 42 times the bandwidth of the first Gulf War.[25] Space is a critical military domain, with satellites allowing for navigation, tracking other states' assets, and targeting or guiding unmanned systems.[26]

It is very difficult to deter attacks through punishment in these two domains because the benefits are so high—potentially preventing U.S. intervention—and the human cost is relatively low. Because of this, any U.S. threat to impose an unacceptable cost in response is by its nature incredible,

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21 Michael J. Mazarr, "Understanding Deterrence," RAND Corporation, April 19, 2018 ~ https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE295.html.

22 Ibid.

23 Brian Weeden, "Current and Future Trends in Chinese Counterspace Capabilities," Institut français des relations internationals, Proliferation Papers, no. 62, November 2020, 33 ~ https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/etudes-de-lifri/proliferation-papers/current-and-future-trends-chinese-counterspace.

24 Ibid.

25 David Talbot, "How Technology Failed in Iraq," *MIT Technology Review*, November 1, 2004 ~ https://www.technologyreview.com/2004/11/01/232152/how-technology-failed-in-iraq.

26 Emily Young Carr, "China and Russia Cooperate on Rival to GPS," *Diplomat*, November 18, 2021 ~ https://thediplomat.com/2021/11/china-and-russia-cooperate-on-rival-to-gps.

given that attacks in cyber and space do not directly result in loss of life. U.S. strategists have considered the challenge and have promoted the idea of cross-domain deterrence; if there are few effective strategies in space or cyberspace that would deter China, perhaps punishment in another domain would be more successful.[27] But it is hard to imagine a U.S. president authorizing lethal force against China in the air, ground, or sea domains (not to mention nuclear) if Beijing had yet to do so.

Second, in some scenarios, the strategic benefits of using force may outweigh any realistic imposed costs for China. Taiwan is a perfect example. "Reunification" with Taiwan has been a top priority for the Chinese Communist Party. If obtaining this objective costs China its navy in the process, it would still be a worthwhile victory. Furthermore, China is unlikely to be deterred by potential economic costs. Chinese analysts have good reason to think that the international response would be tolerable.[28] The unified economic response against Russia after its invasion of Ukraine is unlikely to significantly change this calculus.[29] China's economy is both far larger and deliberately more diversified than Russia's precisely to protect itself from outside pressures. In addition, sanctions efforts like those presently aimed at Russia would be much harder to sustain against China; in fact, China could even reap economic benefits from controlling Taiwan, whose manufacturers accounted for more than 60% of global revenue from semiconductors in 2020. Should China take Taiwan, Beijing could gain an economic and military advantage by depriving the United States and its allies of Taiwanese semiconductors.[30]

Minilateral groupings, such as the Quad, might help with some of the challenges of deterrence by punishment. First, while India, Japan, and Australia may not be able to impose the same level of cost as the United States, their threats of punishment may be more credible because they have more at stake than the United States. Japan and China dispute ownership of the Senkaku Islands, which offer strategic benefits, including access to the East China Sea and nearby shipping lanes, as well as economic benefits in

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27 King Mallory, "New Challenges in Cross-Domain Deterrence," RAND Corporation, April 12, 2018 ~ https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE259.html.

28 Oriana Skylar Mastro, "Strait of Emergency? Debating Beijing's Threat to Taiwan," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2021.

29 Oriana Skylar Mastro, "Invasions Are Not Contagious," *Foreign Affairs*, March 3, 2022 ~ https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/taiwan/2022-03-03/invasions-are-not-contagious.

30 Mastro, "Strait of Emergency?"

fishing, oil, and gas.[31] China may believe Japan's willingness to absorb, and thus impose, costs to be more credible since Tokyo has more at stake. India and China share a contested boarder, along which multiple skirmishes have broken out in recent years. For this reason, nuclear threats emanating from India during a border conflict are likely more credible than those coming from the United States in a Taiwan scenario.

Second, economic or political costs may have greater deterrent value against Beijing than military costs, thus creating an opportunity for the Quad. China's pursuit of territorial integrity (as Beijing's defines it) is seen as a necessary but subordinate interest to overall national rejuvenation. The possibility of international isolation and coordinated punishment following an invasion of Taiwan might seem like a threat to Xi Jinping's great Chinese experiment. Eight of China's top ten trading partners are democracies, and nearly 60% of China's exports go to the United States and its allies. If these countries responded to a Chinese assault on Taiwan by completely severing trade ties with China, the economic costs would threaten the developmental components of Xi's national rejuvenation plan. Indefinite economic and diplomatic isolation would be a cost too high for China to bear.[32] Granted, this is a highly unlikely scenario—the United States and its allies were not willing to go so far against Russia, which has far less ability to retaliate economically in return. But to increase the credibility of such a threat, more progress should be made on coordinating responses in all domains to Chinese aggression. For example, the Quad countries need to link more explicitly their responses to economic coercion and consider establishing economic tripwires.

It is hard to demonstrate this willingness through diplomatic or economic means in peacetime at lower levels of crisis or conflict. Military maneuvers, by contrast, are available at any and all levels of escalation. In other words, the potency of the Quad is not so much the threat that these countries will fight together against China. But joint military activities signal a willingness to provoke China and suffer economic consequences in peacetime, which more credibly signals a willingness to suffer economically to isolate China in wartime.

This means the Quad and other relevant minilateral groupings need to change their messaging strategy. In a September 2021 joint statement, the

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31 Todd Hall, "Why the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands Are Like a Toothpaste Tube," War on the Rocks, September 4, 2019 ~ https://warontherocks.com/2019/09/why-the-senkaku-diaoyu-islands-are-like-a-toothpaste-tube.

32 Mastro, "The Taiwan Temptation"; and Mastro, "Strait of Emergency?"

Quad reaffirmed its commitment to "promoting the free, open, rules-based order, rooted in international law and undaunted by coercion, to bolster security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and beyond."[33] This message should go further and emphasize that the imperative to protect rules, norms, and national security outweighs any economic considerations. Countries that have signed strategic partnerships with China that include language saying the opposite—that they will prioritize economic over political, diplomatic, and military considerations—should consider revising the language in those agreements with Beijing as a first step.

Deterrence by denial. Deterrence by denial strategies prevent or limit an adversary's aggressive actions by creating the perception that such actions will not succeed. Minilaterals have a significant role to play in deterrence by denial. The United States' best strategy for deterring Chinese aggression against Taiwan or others is working with regional allies and partners to establish an effective forward defense.[34] This type of deterrence by denial strategy would involve positioning missile launchers and armed drones near Taiwan and more long-range munitions, especially anti-ship weapons, in places such as Guam, Japan, and the Philippines to convince Chinese leaders that their forces could not physically make it across the strait.[35] The United States and its allies could also consider non-kinetic attacks against Chinese capabilities, in particular in the cyber and space realms. Yet, given China's lesser reliance on these systems than the United States for warfighting, it is unclear whether the impact would be sufficient to effect denial.

Denial-based strategies are more effective than punishment-based strategies in an environment where China could feasibly blunt U.S. attempts at punishment or choose to incur the costs.[36] From a cost-effectiveness standpoint, deterrence by denial places the greater economic burden on China than on the United States and its allies and partners because power-projection forces are far more expensive than A2/AD forces.[37]

But, as previously discussed, the United States does not have the regional force posture to deny China its objectives. Part of this limitation

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33 "Quad Leaders' Joint Statement."

34 Elbridge Colby and Walter Slocombe, "The State of (Deterrence by) Denial," War on the Rocks, March 22, 2021 ~ https://warontherocks.com/2021/03/the-state-of-deterrence-by-denial.

35 Mastro, "The Taiwan Temptation."

36 Erica D. Borghard, Benjamin Jensen, and Mark Montgomery, "Elevating 'Deterrence by Denial' in U.S. Defense Strategy," Atlantic Council, February 4, 2021 ~ https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/seizing-the-advantage/elevating-deterrence-by-denial-in-us-defense-strategy.

37 Michael Beckley, "The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia: How China's Neighbors Can Check Chinese Naval Expansion," *International Security* 42, no. 2 (2017): 78–119.

relates to base access, which partners and allies can help remedy. If countries were willing to host U.S. denial capabilities—such as land-based intermediate-range ballistic missiles—or even war material such as fuel and munitions for the United States, this would represent a qualitative and quantitative improvement in force posture.

Part of the issue also lies in logistics and supply. The United States does not have the manufacturing power to quickly produce new munitions in the event of a prolonged conflict, and munitions acquisition has been declining in recent years.[38] The 2018 Interagency Task Force concluded the following, for example:

> China represents a significant and growing risk to the supply of materials deemed strategic and critical to U.S. national security. In addition to China dominating many material sectors at the upstream source of supply (e.g., mining), it is increasingly dominating downstream value-added materials processing and associated manufacturing supply chains, both in China and in other countries.[39]

China is also either the sole source or a primary supplier for a number of critical energetic materials used in munitions and missiles. New defense pacts between the United States and Japan include plans for the latter to supply logistical support in fuel and ammunition, and Tokyo and Washington are discussing jointly stockpiling munitions near Taiwan.[40] At present, Quad countries are reliant on China for rare earth elements, but Australia—which holds the sixth-largest reserves of rare earth minerals—offers a pathway to reducing dependency.[41] Likewise, Japan, Taiwan, and the United States are key semiconductor producers, which creates a point of vulnerability within China's high-tech supply chain.[42]

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38 Ken Moriyasu, "U.S. and Japan to Jointly Stockpile Munitions, Including Near Taiwan," *Nikkei Asia*, January 16, 2022 ~ https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/U.S.-and-Japan-to-jointly-stockpile-munitions-including-near-Taiwan; and Aaron Mehta, "The U.S. Is Running Out of Bombs—and It May Soon Struggle to Make More," *Defense News*, May 22, 2018 ~ https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2018/05/22/the-us-is-running-out-of-bombs-and-it-may-soon-struggle-to-make-more.

39 Interagency Task Force in Fulfillment of Executive Order 13806, "Assessing and Strengthening the Manufacturing and Defense Industrial Base and Supply Chain Resiliency of the United States," U.S. Department of Defense, September 2018 ~ https://media.defense.gov/2018/oct/05/2002048904/-1/-1/1/assessing-and-strengthening-the-manufacturing-and%20defense-industrial-base-and-supply-chain-resiliency.pdf.

40 Joe Gould, "U.S., Japan Agree to Two Defense Pacts amid China Worries," *Defense News*, January 7, 2022 ~ https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2022/01/07/us-japan-agree-to-two-defense-pacts-amid-china-worries; and Moriyasu, "U.S. and Japan to Jointly Stockpile Munitions."

41 Matthew Page and John Coyne, "Australia Has a Key Role to Play in Reducing China's Rare-Earths Dominance," Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Strategist, February 25, 2021 ~ https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australia-has-a-key-role-to-play-in-reducing-chinas-rare-earths-dominance.

42 Zack Cooper, "How to Tame China," *Washington Examiner*, November 11, 2021 ~ https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/restoring-america/patriotism-unity/how-to-tame-china.

Deterrence by resiliency. This last category of deterrence is underappreciated and underutilized—deterrence by resiliency. Similar to deterrence by punishment, deterrence by resiliency is primarily concerned with how to shape an adversary's perceptions of the deterrer's capabilities. However, unlike deterrence by punishment, the goal is not to create fear of retaliation but rather to encourage the perception that disruptive events would have little effect. Believing that attempts to impose costs will be of limited benefit, the adversary is then less likely to pursue such a path.[43] The concept is related to deterrence by denial but differs in that a country is not preventing the successful execution of military operations. Operational-level actions will succeed, but deterrence by resiliency then shows that this success will not translate into the attainment of strategic-level objectives as previously thought.

The term "resiliency" is used here to refer to a state's ability to both absorb and deflect costs at a given level of violence. As such, resiliency is about signaling to China that the benefits of a particular action are less than China believes them to be. This can be because countries have viable alternatives, redundancy, or improved defenses. For example, it is hard to deter China from attacking space assets because the operational benefits are so high and the costs low. In this case, increasing defenses is not possible. But the United States can take several actions to show that, in reality, such an attack would not greatly affect U.S. operations—perhaps the United States can more quickly launch new satellites into orbit than it did previously, has placed several constellations to enhance redundancy, or has signed agreements with other countries to be able to quickly substitute national assets with theirs.

China largely believes that it can threaten to impose costs on countries to prevent them from working together in ways that go against Chinese interests. Beijing's first response to minilateral groupings will be to threaten costs if such cooperation is used to constrain China. In other words, a major factor that determines whether a minilateral grouping has the ability to deter China is whether Beijing convinces participants not to engage in ways that would successfully achieve this goal. By building resiliency, smaller countries reduce the effectiveness of this coercion. Thus, countries in minilateral groupings should prioritize this form of deterrence as they consider ways to cooperate.

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[43] Erica D. Borghard, "A Grand Strategy Based on Resilience," War on the Rocks, January 4, 2021 ~ https://warontherocks.com/2021/01/a-grand-strategy-based-on-resilience.

In the final analysis, understanding the dynamics of deterrence in the Indo-Pacific is more than just an intellectual exercise.[44] If the Quad focuses its efforts on undermining China's A2/AD efforts, enhancing the U.S. position in the first island chain, signaling a willingness to impose economic and political costs on Beijing, and demonstrating a strengthened ability to sustain the repercussions, then such a grouping of states could have a significant impact on deterring Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific. ◈

[44] There is substantial debate in the field regarding effective deterrence in the region. For example, Graham Allison argues that declaring unambiguous U.S. military support for Taiwan might embolden Taipei, thereby provoking an attack from Beijing and embroiling Washington in war. Richard Haass and David Sacks argue that strategic clarity on the U.S. commitment would enhance deterrence and prevent conflict. Political commentator Peter Beinart believes that the United States is courting world war by moving toward official relations with Taiwan. Others think Taiwan's greater integration into the international community would increase the costs of conflict for Beijing, thus preventing conflict. See Peter Beinart, "Biden's Taiwan Policy Is Truly, Deeply Reckless," *New York Times*, May 5, 2021 ~ https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/05/opinion/biden-taiwan-china.html; Graham Allison, "Destined for War?" *National Interest*, May/June 2017, 9–21; Richard Haass and David Sacks, "American Support for Taiwan Must Be Unambiguous," *Foreign Affairs*, September 2, 2020 ~ https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/american-support-taiwan-must-be-unambiguous; and Mastro, "The Taiwan Temptation."

A Strategy of Distribution for Addressing the PLA of 2025–30

Eric Sayers

Today's military balance in the western Pacific is the product of the successful 25-year effort by the People's Republic of China (PRC) to build a military capability that specifically targets and holds at risk U.S. air and maritime forces. Since the Taiwan Strait crisis in the mid-1990s, China has worked diligently to exploit vulnerabilities in U.S. forces and mitigate U.S. strengths. The PRC's geography, strategy, and military systems place the U.S. military—and the interests it defends—at significant risk. There is reason to believe that Beijing could now successfully launch a lightning attack that would seize a strategic advantage or objective. This, in turn, would force Washington either to accept the result of an attempted *fait accompli* or to engage in a high-risk military conflict to dislodge People's Liberation Army (PLA) forces from their target.

This wicked problem is further exacerbated by the time horizons that the United States and its allies confront when planning to address the PLA as a challenge over multiple decades. Anything is possible in the arena of defense planning when timelines are pushed well into the future. It is convenient for Washington to focus on the military challenge the PRC will pose in the 2030s and beyond, when exciting emerging technologies and new military hardware promise to offer operational capabilities that can theoretically close the gap between the two militaries but do not yet exist. Yet Washington would be falling into a temporal planning trap if it only organized to address the PRC military dilemma of 2035. As the past year has demonstrated, Beijing has escalated its use of coercion and aggression in areas of significant U.S. interest in the western Pacific. Given this reality, the Pentagon, lawmakers, and the White House need a strategy that can effectively deter the PLA in the near to medium term (2025–30). The grave costs, potential for miscalculation, and impact of the eroding military

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NOTE: This essay draws on the author's previous works "Countering China's Military Challenge, Today," Defense One, April 20, 2021 (with Abe Denmark); "Seizing the Advantage in the Asia Pacific," Foundation for Defense of Democracies, December 15, 2020 (with Mark Montgomery); and "Addressing America's Operational Shortfall in the Pacific," War on the Rocks, June 18, 2019 (with Mark Montgomery).

balance on the United States' allies necessitate a near-term approach to ensure that Beijing does not miscalculate.

A range of options are available to policymakers in the United States and its allies in the Indo-Pacific to manipulate Beijing's perception of risk and enhance deterrence during this time period. Beijing would prefer to isolate an adversary like Taiwan using a quick and geographically limited military operation. Therefore, the most effective way to respond would be to adopt a strategy that seeks to distribute the number of diplomatic opponents, regional basing targets, and strike assets that the PRC must contend with if it is determined to achieve its military objectives. Unlike building a new navy or developing a new military capability, a strategy of distribution could be adopted and deployed in just one five-year defense plan and for a fraction of the overall defense budget.

Addressing the PLA Dilemma: A Strategy of Distribution

The United States is today experiencing the impact of the PRC's 25-year modernization effort, initiated after the 1995–96 Taiwan Strait crisis, to design and build a military capability and capacity that specifically targets U.S. air and maritime forces.[1] This procurement effort aims to exploit vulnerabilities in U.S. forces and mitigate risk from known U.S. strengths. Investments of greatest concern to U.S. war planners include the anti-ship ballistic missile threats to U.S. aircraft carriers, anti-ship cruise missile threats to U.S. surface ships, and both ground- and air-launched cruise missile and ballistic missile threats to U.S. and allied air bases and fixed logistics sites. In addition to these missile developments, the PRC's success in both modernizing and growing capacity in destroyers, long-range bombers, submarines, air defense, and electronic warfare systems, as well as long-range surveillance and targeting capabilities, also reduces or eliminates U.S. advantages. These PLA systems place the United States' most important military forces—much of the "contact" and "blunt" layers identified in the United States' 2018 National Defense Strategy—at significant risk.[2] The PRC's investments in precision-strike capabilities from the land, sea, and air reflect an effort to be able to attack bases and other strike assets and

1 U.S. Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021* (Washington, D.C., November 2021) ~ https://media.defense.gov/2021/Nov/03/2002885874/-1/-1/0/2021-cmpr-final.pdf.

2 Elbridge A. Colby, "Hearing on Implementation of the National Defense Strategy," testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Washington, D.C., January 29, 2019 ~ https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Colby_01-29-19.pdf.

delay or deny the ability of U.S. forces to operate along the PRC's periphery.[3] This reality makes it appear to U.S. allies and partners that Beijing could successfully seek a *fait accompli* by launching a quick, sharp conflict.

Given that there are few new capabilities the Pentagon can deploy in large enough numbers in the coming decade to dramatically affect the geographic-operational balance, Washington must look to adopt a strategy that seeks to force the PRC to dramatically expand the horizontal and vertical scopes of conflict if the PLA is to achieve its military objectives. Beijing would prefer to focus military power against only a small number of opponents and targets in a limited geographic area. As it currently stands, the PRC might conclude that it can achieve a quick victory if it paralyzes the United States by targeting key U.S. facilities in Japan and Guam along with Carrier Strike Group 5 in Yokosuka, Japan. Therefore, PRC planning could be made significantly more complex in the 2025–30 time period if the PLA were forced to contend with an operational environment where its problems were distributed across multiple operating locations, fire domains, and contributions from key U.S. allies, such as Japan and Australia. A strategy of distribution would seek to address the strategic stability dilemma the PLA currently poses by constructing a layered, multi-domain, and alliance-based deterrence force. This strategy could be achieved by investing in new operating locations on U.S. soil and in key locations in Japan and Australia; deploying more strike assets across the air, land, sea, and sub-surface domains; and enhancing joint planning and reviewing roles and missions with (and between) Japan and Australia.

Distribute posture. Beginning in the 1970s, for political and diplomatic reasons, U.S. posture in the Asia-Pacific region was slowly shifted out of bases in South Vietnam (1973), Taiwan (1979), and the Philippines (1991) and consolidated in Northeast Asia (Japan and South Korea), where most U.S. forces have been since the 1990s. For the first two decades of China's modernization effort (1994–2012), U.S. force posture in Asia remained largely stagnant, if not regressive. Since 2012, a modest effort to modernize and reposition U.S. forces in Asia has taken place. Shaping these changes were two factors. First was a desire to rebalance U.S. operating locations from a concentration in Northeast Asia to locations throughout Southeast Asia. Second was the Obama administration's rightful effort to realize a new

[3] Thomas Shugart, "First Strike: China's Missile Threat to U.S. Bases in Asia," Center for a New American Security, June 28, 2017 ~ https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/first-strike-chinas-missile-threat-to-u-s-bases-to-asia.

posture that was "geographically distributed, politically sustainable, and operationally relevant."[4]

Washington should devote the political and budgetary resources necessary to distribute force posture in the theater to create a targeting challenge for the PLA and ensure that key U.S. forces remain in the fight. China's efforts to put at risk U.S. and allied airfields and logistics facilities with large numbers of modern cruise and ballistic missiles place U.S. air superiority at risk. To address this threat, the United States must be able to rapidly adjust its intra-theater airpower and develop operational concepts that generate maximum combat power from an increasingly resilient architecture. Therefore, Washington should prioritize new airfield investments in the following order to maximize political flexibility: (1) on forward U.S. territory, including Guam, Palau, Yap, Tinian, and Saipan, (2) on existing bases in Japan, (3) on sites where the United States may gain access, including in Australia, and (4) in locations where access may be possible but cannot be assured, including Singapore and the Philippines.

More specifically, the U.S. military should consider repositioning strike fighters currently at Kadena Air Force Base in Okinawa to bases in northern Japan. Doing so would distribute strike power and move some fighters farther out of range of the majority of China's short- and medium-range missiles. Additionally, to better defend Guam, whose Andersen Air Force Base enables bomber and tanker reach across the entire theater, planners need a medium-term way to raise the cost of a PLA attack. A land-based Aegis system that uses an existing radar and the Standard Missile family could be deployed within the decade at a relatively low cost, enhancing strategic resiliency by forcing the PLA to devote more attention and resources to neutralize it.[5] According to testimony from U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, such a system would also free up three or more destroyers for other priority missions.[6]

Distribute strike domains. The Pentagon should also seek to increase its strike options across both military services and geographic domains. Each service can make the case that it excels at a specific mission, but an

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4 Bob Work, "Deputy Secretary of Defense Speech: A New Global Posture for a New Era," U.S. Department of Defense, September 30, 2014 ~ https://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/605614/a-new-global-posture-for-a-new-era.

5 Bradley Bowman and Shane Praiswater, "Guam Needs Aegis Ashore," *Defense News*, August 25, 2020 ~ https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2020/08/25/guam-needs-aegis-ashore.

6 Mallory Shelbourne, "Davidson: Aegis Ashore on Guam Would 'Free Up' 3 Navy Destroyers," USNI News, March 4, 2021 ~ https://news.usni.org/2021/03/04/davidson-aegis-ashore-on-guam-would-free-up-3-navy-destroyers.

effective strategy toward the PLA of 2025 would be to build redundancy and resilience across key mission areas. The deployment of anti-ship and land-attack systems that can operate from the air, surface, land, and sub-surface from the U.S. Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, and Army would be a robust blunt force challenge to PLA planners. As with basing posture, China's desired operational situation is one in which it can hold a smaller number of nodes at risk to cripple U.S. power projection. A distributed strike architecture could be deployed relatively soon and would create a large targeting dilemma for the PLA that would contribute to conventional stability while also reassuring regional allies.

This effort will require survivable maritime strike systems, both inside the first island chain (such as surface and sub-surface systems with strike payloads) and outside the first island chain (carriers with long-range strike platforms and bombers). These systems should be paired with a resilient, survivable space-based surveillance and targeting system. This pairing of sensors, platforms, and weapons will demonstrate credible U.S. operational and logistics postures to allies and adversaries alike.

One remaining area of U.S. asymmetric advantage against China is the U.S. Navy's attack submarine force, but to enable a strategy of distribution, these forces must be rapidly available in theater and in sufficient numbers. The current planned force of 55 attack submarines is projected to decline precipitously over the next ten years to a low of 42, which would result in too few submarines in the Pacific.[7] Over the long term, this deficit could be corrected by moving to a build rate of three per year. To address the 2025–30 distribution strategy for strike domains, however, the U.S. Navy should reposition submarines to the Pacific, including basing new Virginia-class submarines in Hawaii, basing two additional submarines in Guam (bringing the total to six), and upgrading the pier infrastructure in Guam to allow Virginia-class submarines to be based there (currently, only Los Angeles–class submarines can be based in Guam).

The United States should also seek to rotate large quantities of mobile ground-based strike systems across the first island chain that can place PLA maritime and land targets at risk with conventional weapons.[8] The U.S. Army and Marine Corps should be able to deploy these systems

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7 "Navy Virginia (SSN-774) Class Attack Submarine Procurement: Background and Issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service, CRS Report for Congress, RL32418, March 31, 2022 ~ https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL32418/222.

8 Sugio Takahashi and Eric Sayers, "America and Japan in a Post-INF World," War on the Rocks, March 8, 2019 ~ https://warontherocks.com/2019/03/america-and-japan-in-a-post-inf-world.

in larger numbers in the coming years, which could be maintained in theater in Guam and then rotated on a regular basis to Japan, Australia, and elsewhere if the host nations can be persuaded that such an initiative supports mutual interests.

Multilateralize China's diplomatic problems. Washington is blessed with a range of allies and partners across the Indo-Pacific region. Many of these countries have shared security interests and are eager to engage in military cooperation, purchase U.S. military equipment, and even host U.S. forces on a permanent (Singapore) or regular (Malaysia) basis. Despite these advantages, for the purposes of contingency planning, the United States can only assume that Japan and perhaps Australia will be willing to contribute to a strategy of distribution to complicate PLA planning and, if necessary, contribute to coalition warfighting. A strategy of distribution also assumes that U.S. allies in Europe—which possess significant air and maritime capabilities, have a broad set of interests in the region, and regularly deploy to the region for exercises and port visits—are unlikely to contribute military support directly or indirectly during a contingency. Finally, although India is part of a maturing Quad effort with the United States, Japan, and Australia, unless New Delhi's interests are directly challenged in a shared maritime domain—such as the Indian Ocean region—its military support is also unlikely during the medium-term timelines this essay has taken as its focus.

To exploit opportunities for enhancing deterrence in the 2025–30 timeline with Tokyo and Canberra, Washington should pursue a range of actions. First, it should continue to trilaterally (and quadrilaterally with India) bring diplomatic attention to the importance of stability in the Taiwan Strait and other contested maritime environments such as the South and East China Seas. To the extent Beijing wants these issues to remain bilateral disputes, U.S. strategy will benefit from an effort to diplomatically multilateralize these problems and signal to China a growing regional resolve. Efforts by the Biden administration throughout 2021 strongly served this end.[9]

Second, Washington should focus on distributing posture and strike capabilities on the sovereign territory of both Japan and Australia. Distributing new posture opportunities and deploying strike assets, including bombers, fighters, tankers, maritime patrol aircraft such as the

[9] Ken Moriyasu, "Biden and Suga Refer to 'Peace and Stability of Taiwan Strait' in Statement," *Nikkei Asia*, April 17, 2021 ~ https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Biden-and-Suga-refer-to-peace-and-stability-of-Taiwan-Strait-in-statement.

P-8, and ground-based fire capabilities, to both countries could be achieved in a short time with additional funding for military construction and rotational forces. This evolved, alliance-based military architecture would force the PRC, if it is on the brink of conflict, to decide not only whether it is willing to vertically escalate militarily against U.S. forces in the theater but also whether it is willing to accept the costs of horizontally escalating hostilities by striking the territory of other countries, thus likely drawing them into the conflict.

Finally, the three allies should review military roles and missions and undertake new joint planning efforts to prepare for various contingencies that could arise later this decade. All three countries have powerful attack submarine capabilities and growing fleets of F-35 fighters and are developing modern, ground-based anti-ship missile systems. How can these capabilities be deployed more effectively as part of a strategy of distribution? Some planning may still be needed bilaterally with Washington, but that should not prevent the three allies from standing up new, high-end exercises, signaling a growing level of collective military resolve, and exploring ways to further integrate their military planning.

Paying for It All and Handing Off a Peaceful Competition to the 2030s

In many ways, a strategy of distribution is relatively affordable because it relies on the existing force structure that is available this decade while enhancing how and where it is postured. This plan will require additional theater-enabling capabilities (including military construction for facilities), funding for joint exercises, and resources for additional rotational forces. To achieve this, the U.S. Defense Department should adopt a five-year budget plan for the Indo-Pacific, similar to the European Deterrence Initiative, to direct more theater-enabling resources to address shortfalls.[10] A Pacific Deterrence Initiative that draws 1% of the total annual defense budget would likely suffice for this primary challenge while allowing the services to continue to invest in force development for the future. While congressional support is necessary, as with the European Deterrence Initiative, this initiative can only be successful with full Pentagon support.

Discussions about the military balance in Asia focus too heavily on capabilities and too little on timing. The U.S.-China competition will likely develop over multiple decades. Given this reality, the U.S. Department of

[10] Randy Schriver and Eric Sayers, "The Case for a Pacific Deterrence Initiative," War on the Rocks, March 10, 2020 ~ https://warontherocks.com/2020/03/the-case-for-a-pacific-deterrence-initiative.

Defense must be able to plan and invest in future force development for the uncertainty of the 2030s and 2040s while simultaneously taking steps to enable a more lethal joint force in the 2020s. With a more assertive PRC under Xi Jinping's leadership, the United States and its allies should focus on ensuring that Beijing does not conclude it can easily resort to military force to pursue its objectives this decade. By exploiting the advantages of minilateral cooperation with Tokyo and Canberra, deploying new intra-theater operating locations, and generating strike options from more domains, a strategy of distribution presents a realistic, affordable, and near-term approach to ensure the 2020s remain a period of peace. ◈

A New Strategic Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific

Kei Koga

The emergence of "strategic minilateralism" has been a trend in the Indo-Pacific since the second half of the 2010s. Although minilateral cooperation between the United States and its allies and partners started in the early 2000s, the late 2010s saw more institutionalized and strategically oriented forms of minilateral security collaboration begin to emerge from two main drivers: the rise of China and the lack of effective regional security mechanisms for responding to that rise.[1]

China's rejection of the South China Sea Arbitral Tribunal ruling in July 2016 served as a particular catalyst for this new "strategic minilateralism" in the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, Beijing's growing regional influence, including through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has become more visible, drawing diplomatic support for China's presence from its neighbors. In response to China's rise and the threat it poses to U.S. regional primacy, Washington has attempted to link its bilateral alliances and partnerships together since the early 2000s, as shown in the establishment of the Australia-Japan-U.S. Trilateral Strategic Dialogue in 2002. Nevertheless, this effort has not yet proved to be sufficiently effective in pushing back against China. In this context, new strategic minilaterals, such as the Quad (comprising Australia, Japan, India, and the United States) and AUKUS (comprising Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), have been constructed.

Examining the institutional development and key characteristics of the Indo-Pacific's new strategic minilateralism, particularly the Quad and AUKUS, this essay argues that such frameworks are largely a Western construct that attempt to fill the expectation and capability gaps in regional security systems for underwriting the existing regional order. There are basically two types of minilateralism: one aims to shape the regional order through rule- and norm-making, while the other focuses on military cooperation to check rising powers' behavior. Both share the same strategic

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[1] Here, "institutionalization" refers to the regularization or routinization of cooperative activities among member states, whereas "formalization" refers to the creation of an organization with a defined set of principles, rules, and norms.

objective—to defend the existing international order from challenges posed by states that provide alternatives to it, particularly China. While these institution-building efforts are creating a new regional institutional architecture in the Indo-Pacific, its development remains an ongoing process. The success of minilateralism depends on how the United States and other members of these groupings formulate a grand design for minilateral frameworks and develop an optimal division of labor among themselves.

Defining Indo-Pacific Minilateralism

The term "minilateralism" is often used without a clear definition. This essay defines minilateralism as an informal or formal grouping of three to five states that aim to coordinate their strategic agendas and facilitate functional cooperation in particular issue areas.[2] To be sure, the number of states required for any grouping to be considered a minilateral is relative, depending on what types of multilateralism exist and are dominant in the region at any given time. For example, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which has been considered a multilateral framework ever since its 1967 inception, grew from its original five members to ten in 1999. In Central Asia, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, established in 2001, consists of six states and is considered a multilateral framework. By contrast, the Five Power Defence Arrangements has a mixed record: while it was traditionally considered to be multilateral, some now regard it as a minilateral grouping.[3] According to the definition adopted in this essay, however, in the contemporary Indo-Pacific context, any interstate groupings comprising only three to five members should be considered minilateral rather than multilateral.

Even according to this definition, minilateralism remains a fluid and flexible concept. It encompasses both informal and formal arrangements, with minilateral groupings sometimes transitioning between these two categories. For example, the China-Japan-Korea Trilateral Summit was originally an informal gathering held back to

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2 This largely resonates with the definition provided by Bhubhindar Singh and Sarah Teo of "cooperative relations that usually involve between three and nine countries, and are relatively exclusive, flexible and functional in nature." However, my definition differs from their emphasis on informality and exclusivity. See Bhubhindar Singh and Sarah Teo, "Introduction: Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific," in *Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific*, ed. Bhubhindar Singh and Sarah Teo (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 2.

3 See, for example, Ralf Emmers, "The Role of the Five Power Defence Arrangements in the Southeast Asian Security Architecture," in *Bilateralism, Multilateralism and Asia-Pacific Security: Contending Cooperation*, ed. William T. Tow and Brendan Taylor (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 88.

back with the ASEAN +3 process. Since 2008, however, it has evolved into a more formal framework after it was convened independently and then formalized through the establishment of the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat in 2010. The Trilateral Summit also gradually expanded its agenda to include economic and diplomatic issues alongside nontraditional security cooperation.[4] By contrast, the formal U.S.-Japan-Korea Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group, which was created in 1999 to facilitate policy coordination among the three vis-à-vis North Korea, crumbled under the weight of Pyongyang's developing nuclear and missile capabilities and ultimately ceased to exist by 2003. Yet informal consultations between Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo have continued, often on the sidelines of larger gatherings such as the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore.[5]

Membership can also be expanded, both formally and informally. Even when minilateral frameworks have maintained their original membership, the possibility of expansion is not precluded. For example, the China-Japan-Korea framework devised the "trilateral+X" formula in 2019 to extend its functional cooperation with nonmember states.[6] Similarly, the Quad has informally invited nonmember states such as Vietnam, South Korea, and New Zealand to discuss cooperation in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.[7]

Given its flexibility, contemporary minilateralism is useful in assessing the possibility of coalition building with like-minded states.[8] Using relatively easy areas of cooperation as a starting point, such as diplomatic consultation and countering Covid-19, a minilateral can potentially expand its role in response to developments in the regional strategic environment.

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4 See Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), "Kako no Nicchukan shuno kaigi" [Past Japan-China-Korea Trilateral Cooperation Summit] ~ https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/jck/syunou_bn.html; and "About TCS: Overview," Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat ~ https://www.tcs-asia.org/en/about/overview.php.

5 "Joint Statement by the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG)," Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Republic of Korea), Press Release, June 14, 2003 ~ https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5676/view.do?seq=295727&srchFr=; and William T. Tow, "Minilateral Security's Relevance to U.S. Strategy in the Indo-Pacific: Challenges and Prospects," *Pacific Review* 32, no. 2 (2019): 232–44.

6 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), "Concept Paper on 'Trilateral+X' Cooperation" ~ https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000508825.pdf.

7 On the Quad Plus, see Jagannath P. Panda and Ernest Gunasekara-Rockwell, eds., *Quad Plus and Indo-Pacific: The Changing Profile of International Relations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022).

8 This purpose is similar to that of tactical hedging, by which states create an ambiguous diplomatic doctrine to draw reactions from allies or partners and seek common ground in creating a coalition. See Kei Koga, "Japan's 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' Strategy: Tokyo's Tactical Hedging and the Implications for ASEAN," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 41, no. 2 (2019): 286–313; and Kei Koga, "Japan's 'Indo-Pacific' Question: Countering China or Shaping a New Regional Order?" *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (2020): 49–73.

The Rise of Minilateralism

Two factors in the 2000s instigated the rise of minilateralism: the growing salience of nontraditional security issues and the rise of China. After the attacks of September 11, terrorism became the most prominent international security issue, and its transnational nature made it necessary to enhance international cooperation. In particular, the United States was eager to create international coalitions, as illustrated by the establishment of the Trilateral Security Dialogue. At the same time, the increase of China's economic and strategic weight began to cast a long shadow over the future strategic environment. Washington envisioned the establishment of strategic networks with its regional allies and partners, most notably India, to check China's behavior.[9]

That said, during this period, minilateral frameworks were largely created on the basis of functional cooperation to address nontraditional security issues. This is partly because more formal coalitions could be easily construed and portrayed as representing the encirclement or containment of China, and some governments were unwilling to create these groupings at the cost of Beijing's criticism. For them, China's economic potential was too attractive, and its potential threat exaggerated. This hesitancy was highlighted by the unsuccessful attempts to establish an earlier iteration of the Quad in 2007.[10] Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe initiated the Quad during this period by holding an official meeting between the four states at the assistant secretary level and by promoting their military cooperation through the Malabar military exercises, which had been previously a U.S.-India bilateral exercise. Yet as China openly expressed its concern regarding the strategic motivation behind the grouping, Australia and India became reticent and ultimately withdrew.[11]

During the 2010s, a new minilateral momentum emerged in response to China's growing assertiveness. By this time, it was becoming increasingly clear that the traditional Asian security architecture, built around the U.S. hub-and-spoke alliance network and ASEAN multilateralism, was not sufficiently effective to maintain the regional status quo. A stronger China was no longer deterred from using diplomatic and military coercion to advance its own version of regional order. Its growing presence in the

9 Nina Silove, "The Pivot before the Pivot: U.S. Strategy to Preserve the Power Balance in Asia," *International Security* 40, no. 4 (2016): 45–88.

10 Kei Koga, "Quad 3.0: Japan, Indo-Pacific, and Minilateralism," *East Asian Policy* 14, no. 1 (2022): 20–38.

11 Kevin Rudd, "The Convenient Rewriting of the History of the 'Quad,'" *Nikkei Asia*, March 26, 2019 ~ https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/The-Convenient-Rewriting-of-the-History-of-the-Quad.

maritime domain, particularly in the South and East China Seas, and rejection of the 2016 South China Sea Arbitral Tribunal ruling subsequently heightened concerns in East Asia. Likewise, China's military and diplomatic pressure on India along the disputed Sino-Indian border became more apparent in the late 2010s. Beijing's new economic heft, particularly in the area of infrastructure development through BRI, challenged existing international development standards. When these developments are taken together, it has become easier to justify the formation and institutionalization of minilateral groupings to counter the China challenge. A new, more strategic Indo-Pacific minilateralism has subsequently emerged.

A New Strategic Minilateralism: The Quad and AUKUS

The new minilateralism of the late 2010s has come in two varieties. One is geared toward maintaining or shaping a regional order in the Indo-Pacific based on the existing, largely U.S.-led regional order. The other seeks to ensure strategic stability within the various subregions of the Indo-Pacific, such as Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, and South Asia.

The most notable example of the former is the Quad. After the United States and Japan took the initiative to resurrect this grouping in 2017, the Quad has become more institutionalized—formally regularizing its senior official, ministerial, and summit meetings while also creating working groups on such issues as the climate crisis, Covid-19, emerging and critical technologies, and infrastructure. As the failure of the first iteration of the Quad highlights, there remain diverging strategic interests among these four Indo-Pacific partners despite their basically shared security perspective on China. This in turn makes it difficult for the Quad to formally institutionalize an agenda for traditional military cooperation. For example, the India-Japan-U.S. Malabar military exercise has formally remained a separate activity from the Quad, although Australia has been invited to participate since 2020. The Quad summit in May 2022 established the Quad Humanitarian and Disaster Relief Mechanism and the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness, but they aim to enhance the regional capacity for disaster management and maritime domain awareness, respectively, and do not constitute specific traditional military cooperation.

Rather than any immediate realization of military cooperation to counter China, the Quad has focused on regional order building in the Indo-Pacific. For example, the region has yet to establish concrete international rules and norms for emerging issues and challenges, such as

digital connectivity and cybersecurity. Through Quad dialogues, member states coordinate their perspectives and policies to prevent any external power, particularly China, from dominating this norm-building process. This was well illustrated by the second Quad summit in September 2021, where members agreed to enhance and create regional norms, such as "transparent, high-standards infrastructure" and "an open, accessible, and secure technological ecosystem" through the establishment of technical standards.[12] In response, China has attempted to prevent the Quad powers from strengthening their influence in regional order building by enhancing and creating its own exclusive frameworks such as the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation and the ASEAN-China dialogues on the South China Sea Code of Conduct.

The Indo-Pacific's other new variety of strategic minilateralism is exemplified by AUKUS. Rather than norm building, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States are putting their energies into strengthening military capabilities through cooperation in the fields of nuclear-powered submarines and additional undersea capabilities, cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence, and quantum technologies.[13] AUKUS is a response to the changing distribution of military capabilities in the Indo-Pacific and is geared toward maintaining regional stability. It envisages Australia having access to new military technologies, particularly the aforementioned nuclear-powered submarines, which will enhance Australian power-projection capabilities in Southeast Asia, the South Pacific, and the Indian Ocean. The UK can, in turn, support an "Indo-Pacific tilt" by securing regional port access in Australia for its navy. The United States too can step up cooperation with Australia and the UK in Indo-Pacific operations, potentially reducing the U.S. military burden without undermining its perceived commitment to this region.

AUKUS is geostrategically significant. Although the United States has strong allies in Northeast Asia—namely Japan and South Korea—these states' vital interests largely rest within this subregion, given enduring tensions on the Korean Peninsula and in the Taiwan Strait. In Southeast Asia, uncertainties have been increasing regarding the U.S. alliance commitments to Thailand and the Philippines because of domestic political

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12 White House, "Fact Sheet: Quad Leaders' Summit," September 24, 2021 ~ https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/24/fact-sheet-quad-leaders-summit.

13 Scott Morrison and Peter Dutton, "Australia to Pursue Nuclear-Powered Submarines through New Trilateral Enhanced Security Partnership," Minister for Foreign Affairs (Australia), September 16, 2021 ~ https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/australia-pursue-nuclear-powered-submarines-through-new-trilateral-enhanced-security-partnership.

turbulence in those countries and the preferences of their leaders. Australia is a staunch U.S. ally, but its power-projection capabilities remain limited. Taken together, AUKUS could help compensate for the presently weak linkages between subregions in the Indo-Pacific to check China's behavior.

The Future Trajectory: Challenges and Opportunities

The new strategic minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific remains a work in progress. Members of the Quad and AUKUS do not yet share the common strategic interests required to form a firmer military alignment. Instead, they predominantly pursue the enhancement of military ties bilaterally, as seen most vividly in the case of India-Japan and Australia-Japan relations. As a result, bilateral and minilateral frameworks now coexist in a multilayered security architecture. However, these arrangements could become integrated into a more robust security framework in the future, especially if China intensifies its assertive behavior and generates shared threat perceptions.

That said, strategic minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific faces two main challenges. First, to meaningfully contribute toward regional order building, these groupings will need to gain diplomatic support from regional constituencies, particularly ASEAN. As a regional institution, ASEAN has long maintained its neutral diplomatic position between the great powers. It has also sought to keep ASEAN centrality intact so it can play a driving role in regionalism.[14] If the Quad and AUKUS come to be seen as clear anti-China groupings, regional instability could be triggered and the association would likely distance itself from the Quad and AUKUS. This would delay and potentially undermine the consolidation of regional order in the Indo-Pacific to which these minilateral frameworks aspire.

A second challenge is the proliferation of minilateral groupings in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. Admittedly, the hub of much of this new activity remains the United States. However, compared with bilateral frameworks, policy coordination in minilateral settings is inevitably slower and more burdensome, and there will remain different requirements and demands within the subregions of the diverse Indo-Pacific. If the proliferation of minilateralism continues, the United States could risk a considerable

[14] ASEAN Secretariat, "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific," June 23, 2019 ~ https://asean.org/speechandstatement/asean-outlook-on-the-indo-pacific; and Kei Koga, "Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision under Suga: Transition and Future Challenges in Southeast Asia," *East Asian Policy* 13, no. 3 (2021): 93–99.

amount of its valuable diplomatic resources becoming bogged down in long diplomatic discussions that ultimately do not produce a commensurate payoff in terms of delivering meaningful action.

In conclusion, the emergence of a new strategic minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific is driven by geostrategic factors that revolve primarily around China's increasing challenge to the existing regional order. The Quad, AUKUS, and other frameworks have the potential to fill the expectation and capability gaps existing between the United States' hub-and-spoke system and ASEAN multilateralism. In so doing, they could help bolster the military outreach of the United States, as well as that of its allies and partners, while providing a regional order–building mechanism in the Indo-Pacific. That said, the consolidation of these minilateral frameworks has just started, and there is no guarantee that they will ultimately be successful. To avoid an outcome in which they are not, the first step should be for the United States and its partners to create a grand strategic objective for those minilateral frameworks that will better guide their coordination and the division of labor among members. ◈

Fit for Purpose: Can Southeast Asian Minilateralism Deter?

Evan A. Laksmana

In examining the development of minilaterals anchored in Southeast Asia, this essay considers whether and, if so, how this subregion could contribute to broader capabilities to deter military aggression. The essay argues that Southeast Asia's experience with minilateralism is much more limited, focused, and functionally driven by specific security challenges such as armed robbery. It is unlikely that Southeast Asian states will be comfortable with a broader minilateral arrangement involving extraregional powers designed to deter China or sideline existing mechanisms led by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). For better or worse, a more limited and functionally driven minilateralism gives Southeast Asian states more control over the direction, scope, and quality of cooperation. As well, analysts from the subregion have warned of the possibility that Indo-Pacific minilateral arrangements could become platforms for major powers to extend their influence.[1]

The essay is divided into three parts. First, it provides an overview of the recent history of minilateralism in Southeast Asia, with a focus on the Malacca Straits Patrol (MSP) between Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand as well as trilateral security cooperation between Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. It also briefly notes other experiences of minilateralism involving Southeast Asian states beyond the security realm. Next, the essay highlights the different features of minilateralism anchored in Southeast Asia in contrast to U.S.-anchored minilateralism and assesses the likelihood of Southeast Asian–led arrangements contributing to a broader deterrence effort against China. Finally, the essay offers several policy considerations regarding whether and, if so, how Southeast Asian–led minilateralism can be of strategic salience in the Indo-Pacific security landscape.

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[1] Bhubhindar Singh and Sarah Teo, "Introduction: Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific," in *Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific*, ed. Bhubhindar Singh and Sarah Teo (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 9.

Southeast Asian–Anchored Minilateralism

In the Indo-Pacific context, minilateralism generally refers to cooperative relations between a group of three to nine countries that are relatively exclusive, flexible, functional, and often informal in nature.[2] Such arrangements should theoretically be nimbler while providing targeted approaches to address specific challenges in ways that existing mechanisms cannot.[3] The "task orientation" of minilateralism also typically renders such groups less threatening to states that perceive themselves to be the target of containment strategies or that have values and interests that depart substantially from perceived multilateral agendas.[4]

Minilateral security cooperation varies based on the grouping's size, goals, processes, and relation to existing arrangements.[5] Different major powers, such as the United States and China, also support their own versions of minilateralism. U.S.-anchored minilateralism, for example, has been designed to complement the United States' Cold War–era system of bilateral alliances with a web of new security mechanisms.[6] Indeed, the United States remains the central hub, although not necessarily the initiator, in recent minilateral arrangements (e.g., the Quad and AUKUS), backed by a broader strategic framework likely centered on or aimed at China. The strategic asymmetry of power is also another key feature in such U.S.-anchored minilateral arrangements.

But Southeast Asian–anchored minilateral experiences differ. For one, many of the minilateral arrangements in Southeast Asia have been driven by limited functional and security needs. Governments also welcome minilateral arrangements where they are equal veto players, not a subordinated spoke to a more powerful hub. Symmetry of power is a priority in Southeast Asian minilateral arrangements, although it is not always achieved. For these reasons, Southeast Asian states have been reluctant to

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2 Singh and Teo, "Introduction," 2. The degree of institutionalization of minilateral arrangements varies; some are based on memorandums of understanding or agreements requiring a yearly implementation framework, while others have joint secretariats or commands. There is no consensus on whether the degree of institutionalization clearly separates minilateralism from multilateralism.

3 Ibid., 5.

4 William T. Tow, "The Trilateral Strategic Dialogue, Minilateralism, and Asia-Pacific Order Building," in "U.S.-Japan-Australia Security Cooperation: Prospects and Challenges," ed. Yuki Tatsumi, Stimson Center, April 2015, 25.

5 See Wooyeal Paik and Jae Jeok Park, "The Quad's Search for Non-military Roles and China's Strategic Response: Minilateralism, Infrastructure Investment, and Regional Balancing," *Journal of Contemporary China* 30, no. 127 (2021): 37–40; and Troy Lee-Brown, "Asia's Security Triangles: Maritime Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific," *East Asia* 35, no. 3 (2018): 163–76.

6 Joel Wuthnow, "U.S. 'Minilateralism' in Asia and China's Responses: A New Security Dilemma?" *Journal of Contemporary China* 28, no. 115 (2019): 135.

engage in minilateral arrangements outside of ASEAN or in those that are directed against China.

Minilateral security arrangements involving only Southeast Asian states have become more prominent over the past two decades. Initially, minilateral groupings that proliferated in the 1990s in this subregion were economically rather than security focused. The Singapore-Johor-Riau Growth Triangle, for example, was created in 1989 and later expanded in 1994 to facilitate cross-border trade and investment flows between Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Around the same time, the Brunei Darussalam–Indonesia–Malaysia–Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area was launched to increase trade, tourism, and investment by facilitating the free movement of people, goods, and services.[7] The Asian Development Bank–backed Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) was founded in 1992 with Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam as key members. In 1999, the Cambodia-Laos-Vietnam Development Triangle was founded to focus on infrastructure development, trade, and investment.

Some Southeast Asian minilateral arrangements have also engaged extraregional states. The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), for example, involves Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand and focuses on trade, technology, energy, transport, tourism, and fisheries. Beyond providing specific economic benefits, these minilateral arrangements complement ASEAN multilateralism by narrowing the development gaps between ASEAN member states, facilitating practical and sector-driven cooperation, and strengthening embedded norms of regional economic integration within ASEAN.[8]

However, the experience of Southeast Asian states in minilateral security arrangements is somewhat different. Many still consider security issues, even those limited in scope, such as armed robbery at sea, as sensitive sovereignty problems. This viewpoint makes the process of developing minilateral security arrangements more challenging. Indeed, the development of the MSP suggests that it was the prospect of foreign intervention (including by the United States), not necessarily a worsening

7 Christopher M. Dent and Peter Richter, "Sub-regional Cooperation and Developmental Regionalism: The Case of BIMP-EAGA," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 33, no. 1 (2011): 29–55.

8 Vannarith Chheang, "Minilateralism in Southeast Asia: Facts, Opportunities and Risks," in Singh and Teo, *Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific*, 106.

problem of armed robbery in the Strait of Malacca, that initially drove Malaysia and Indonesia to increase coordinated patrols in 2004.[9]

The MSP is a set of cooperative measures undertaken by Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand to safeguard the Malacca and Singapore Straits. Eventually, the patrols came to involve the coast guards, navies, and air forces of these littoral states. The Eyes in the Sky component of the MSP involves aircraft patrols from the four states. In 2006, the MSP Joint Co-ordinating Committee Terms of Reference and Standard Operating Procedures was signed, and the MSP Intelligence Exchange Group was established. Based on the agreements, ships in the MSP have the right of hot pursuit up to five nautical miles into the sovereign waters of a neighbor. Under the MSP, participating navies conduct coordinated sea patrols while facilitating information sharing between ships and their naval operational centers.[10]

The MSP is complemented by the Cooperative Mechanism, a different framework of cooperation and voluntary contributions by user states of the straits (especially extraregional states) to enhance navigation safety and environmental protection.[11] Although there have been significant operational challenges to the MSP, the group remains the first significantly operationalized minilateral security arrangement in Southeast Asia to have been developed without—and, in fact, out of the fear of prospective intervention by—an extraregional partner.[12]

The MSP was also deemed successful enough that Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines used it as a model to develop their own trilateral cooperation in the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas. Sparked in 2016 by an unprecedented spate of kidnappings reportedly committed by the Abu Sayyaf Group, senior defense officials from the three countries met and negotiated MSP-modeled trilateral cooperative mechanisms, especially coordinated patrols.[13] The three states then established Maritime Command Centers in Sabah, Malaysia; Bongao, the Philippines; and Tarakan,

9 J.N. Mak, "Unilateralism and Regionalism: Working Together and Alone in the Malacca Straits," in *Piracy, Maritime Terrorism and Securing the Malacca Straits*, ed. Graham Gerard Ong-Webb (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2006), 155.

10 There have been discussions for joint, rather than coordinated, sea patrols among the navies, but no solid agreement has been reached as of yet. See Sheldon W. Simon, "Safety and Security in the Malacca Straits: The Limits of Collaboration," *Asian Security* 7, no. 1 (2011): 35–36.

11 Hadyu Ikrami, "Sulu-Sulawesi Seas Patrol: Lessons from the Malacca Straits Patrol and Other Similar Cooperative Frameworks," *International Journal of Marine and Coastal Law* 33, no. 4 (2018): 806.

12 John F. Bradford, "The Growing Prospects for Maritime Security Cooperation in Southeast Asia," *Naval War College Review* 58, no. 3 (2005): 68–69.

13 Ikrami, "Sulu-Sulawesi Seas Patrol," 809.

Indonesia, to coordinate patrols and manage the exchange of information and intelligence. Resembling the MSP, coordinated patrols in the seas mean that each country patrols its respective territory under its respective national command and coordinates its actions with the others. Despite the apparent benefits of joint patrols allowing uniform, efficient, and timely responses,[14] coordinated patrols were preferred, partly because they give each participant equal veto power over the pace, manner, and scope of cooperation.

In mainland Southeast Asia, security minilateralism has also tended to be limited in scope. The riparian states of the Mekong River (Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam) created the Mekong River Commission (MRC) in 1995, for example, to address water security issues.[15] Joint river patrols between China and lower Mekong countries, including Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand, began in 2011, driven by terrorism and trafficking concerns. For Beijing, this was the first time in decades that Chinese forces had operated beyond Chinese territory in a non-UN mission.[16]

Is Southeast Asian–Anchored Minilateralism Different?

The previous section highlighted the limited scope, pace, and operating modalities of existing security minilateralism in Southeast Asia. Despite initial resistance to such arrangements, states gradually have learned to adopt them when they are given equal and regular veto power (through committee processes, for example) over policies, mechanisms, resources, and activities. Minilaterals have allowed Southeast Asian states to claim sufficient responsiveness to shared security challenges and prevent extraregional intervention. It is likely that the comfort level between the several Southeast Asian states that facilitated these arrangements grew out of various ASEAN-related processes over several decades.

Given these features, it is difficult to envisage Southeast Asian minilateral arrangements contributing to general and collective-actor regional deterrence, which refers to the ability of a group of states functioning together to respond forcefully so that potential challengers decide it is not worth the effort to even consider an attack.[17] Instead, Southeast Asian security minilateralism has primarily been geared

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14 Ikrami, "Sulu-Sulawesi Seas Patrol," 809.

15 Chheang, "Minilateralism in Southeast Asia," 107.

16 See Xiaobo Su, "Nontraditional Security and China's Transnational Narcotics Control in Northern Laos and Myanmar," *Political Geography* 48, no. 2 (2015): 78.

17 See Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence Now* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 175–78.

toward cooperating enough to prevent external intervention while addressing routine security challenges. Any deterrence component is likely aimed at nonstate actors (e.g., terrorist groups). The idea that Southeast Asian–anchored minilateralism can contribute to collective-actor deterrence—against China, for instance—is flawed. For one, mainland Southeast Asian states have their own minilateral arrangements with China. Added to this, general collective deterrence is not only too broad but also likely to dilute each regional state's strategic veto power. At best, the Southeast Asian experience suggests familiarity with deterring nonconventional transnational security threats rather than a regional military power.

For collective-actor deterrence to work, robust institutionalized arrangements are needed. The more institutionalized the arrangements among the actors seeking to act in a unified manner, the more likely they can pursue deterrence in their own right—as with NATO, for example, with its well-established procedures, common command structure, and elaborate forces, planning, and training. Yet minilateral arrangements in Southeast Asia have been relatively successful even when they have not been deeply institutionalized. That each arrangement requires regular committee meetings or planning sessions is arguably a sign of under-institutionalization, as is the need for each member to decide on the activities, resources, or policies it is ready to commit to during a given period. Indeed, if one accepts that ASEAN has facilitated the rise of minilateral arrangements among Southeast Asian states, informality and consensus-seeking—key tenets of the "ASEAN way"—must necessarily be a significant part of that foundation too. In short, the experience of Southeast Asian–anchored minilateral arrangements is simply not suited to general and collective deterrence-oriented, strategic arrangements.

Finally, Southeast Asian–anchored minilateral arrangements are also often designed as part of or as complements to existing ASEAN-led institutions. Indeed, security minilateral arrangements that focus on practical cooperation—particularly in the areas of capacity building and information sharing—for nontraditional security issues, such as terrorism or resource security, have been presented as complementary to the realization of the ASEAN Political-Security Community.[18] The ability of Southeast Asian governments to engage in "sensitive" minilateral security arrangements has often depended on their ability to present or frame

[18] Chheang, "Minilateralism in Southeast Asia," 108.

such cooperation as being part of, complementary to, or facilitated by ASEAN-led institutions.

Conclusion: Southeast Asian Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific?

The Southeast Asian minilateral experience is unique in several points. First, the narrative that Southeast Asian states do not welcome arrangements such as the Quad or AUKUS because they are unfamiliar with minilateralism is false. Southeast Asian states have been members of minilateral arrangements for decades. Rather, their minilateral experience has been much more limited and driven by specific security needs. They are also more comfortable in arrangements where each member holds equal veto power and the asymmetry of power is not overwhelming. Their minilateral preferences and orientations are much more linked to considerations surrounding ASEAN-led institutions rather than bilateral alliances. Concerns that the Quad, for example, could be a vehicle for great-power competition exacerbates the broader ambivalence regarding such "new" minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific.

Second, if deterrence is defined as general collective-actor deterrence, then Southeast Asian minilateralism may be incompatible with such goals. As the examples of the MSP and trilateral cooperation in the Sulu Sea suggest, those minilateral arrangements were designed with managing nonstate actors foremost in mind. There is an ongoing discussion among regional analysts about whether it is time for Southeast Asian states to consider broader minilateral arrangements beyond specific security needs so as to recraft the regional order or push back against detrimental behaviors (for example, maritime gray-zone tactics).

Yet Southeast Asian states worry that minilateral arrangements, such as the Quad, can be used to target another state (for example, to contain China). The policy challenge here is to strike that fine balance between working collectively under a minilateral arrangement in a way that addresses state-based security challenges without seemingly targeting that state. Such a balance is particularly salient as far as China is concerned because many Southeast Asian elites consider Beijing as a provider of public goods and private benefits crucial to their own domestic legitimacy and power.[19]

[19] See Evan A. Laksmana, "Why There Are No Grand Alliances in Asia," *Australian Financial Review*, November 26, 2021 ~ https://www.afr.com/policy/foreign-affairs/there-are-no-grand-alliances-in-asia-20211124-p59bmh.

Third, whether Southeast Asian–anchored minilateralism could be a significant feature of the Indo-Pacific depends on two major considerations. One is the extent to which regional policymakers accept that ASEAN remains central to the region's cooperative architecture; some members continue to recognize this, but others prefer not to.[20] If the consensus view within the broader region is that ASEAN needs to remain central in any emerging Indo-Pacific architecture, then minilateral arrangements will have to be filtered through ASEAN-related institutions, such as the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. In effect, ASEAN-related mechanisms may dilute, if not absorb, those minilateral experiences. Added to this is the extent to which Southeast Asian states can grow more comfortable with being part of minilateral arrangements involving extraregional powers. Thus far, the record of Southeast Asian states being part of minilateral arrangements with China, Japan, the United States, and others is mixed.

Taken together, these findings indicate that extraregional powers should be cautious when suggesting that Southeast Asian states are open to joining new groupings like the Quad or that this subregion could develop new arrangements to deter China. To be sure, some Southeast Asian states are ambivalent toward China. But within the context of collective-actor deterrence, the experience of Southeast Asian minilateralism suggests the primacy of sovereignty, veto power, and limited security goals as necessary ingredients. That said, if and when Southeast Asian states decide to seriously consider "non-ASEAN" options in the Indo-Pacific, it would be difficult to ignore the potential utility of minilateral arrangements for regional order and security architecture building. ◈

20 Huong Le Thu, "The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and ASEAN Centrality," in Singh and Teo, *Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific*, 98.

Signals, Deterrence, and the Quad

Ketian Zhang

The United States and its allies have the capability to deter China, and have successfully done so, from their worst-case scenario—a major militarized conflict. However, three factors reduce the effectiveness of their deterrence: the lack of clear signals, excessive media exposure, and divergent interests among Quad members. The Quad can be useful, but only if the United States maintains well-defined signals of commitment while clarifying the stakes. As it currently stands, the Quad does not successfully deter Chinese actions in territorial disputes.

China has not shied away from using military coercion in its land border disputes with India. In June 2020, for instance, Chinese and Indian troops clashed violently along the disputed land border in the Galwan Valley, resulting in casualties on both sides.[1] Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi told India to "stop transgressions into China-controlled territories" and to "refrain from actions changing the status quo along the border," representing a clear indication of coercive intent.[2] Moreover, although China prefers to utilize nonmilitary—or so-called gray-zone—coercion in maritime disputes in the South and East China Seas, such coercive measures can themselves be destabilizing.[3]

This essay assesses factors influencing the likelihood of successful deterrence in the Indo-Pacific region by using China's land and maritime territorial disputes as examples. It addresses two questions: what signals of resolve are necessary for effective deterrence, and does the Quad enhance

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1 Shiv Aroor, "3 Separate Brawls, 'Outsider' Chinese Troops and More: Most Detailed Account of the Brutal June 15 Galwan Battle," *India Today*, June 21, 2020 ~ https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/3-separate-brawls-outsider-chinese-troops-more-most-detailed-account-of-the-brutal-june-15-galwan-battle-1691185-2020-06-21.

2 "Wang Yinfang tong Zhongfang xiangxiang erxing, gongtong weihu liangguo bianjing diqu heping yu anning" [Ministry of Foreign Affairs: China Hopes India to Work Together with China to Maintain Peace and Stability in the Border Region], Xinhua, June 19, 2020 ~ http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2020-06/19/c_1126137390.htm.

3 See Ketian Zhang, "Cautious Bully: Reputation, Resolve, and Beijing's Use of Coercion in the South China Sea," *International Security* 44, no. 1 (2019): 117–59.

deterrence? Finally, it uses the Sino-Indian border and South China Sea disputes to illustrate the conditions under which deterrence can be effective.

The Need for Clearer Signals

The United States and its allies have the capability to potentially deter China's territorial challenges. However, clearer signals of resolve and reassurance are necessary to achieve successful deterrence.

First and foremost, the United States should set clearer red lines; otherwise, the signals sent to China are mixed and ineffective. For example, during its first term, the Obama administration was not sufficiently clear in signaling red lines to China regarding Chinese behavior in the South China Sea. A 2013 Chinese Academy of Social Sciences report on China's regional security environment stated that the implementation of U.S. rebalancing "had a problem of divergence between willingness and capability," citing the lack of U.S. commitment during the Scarborough Shoal incident of April 2012.[4] This lack of clear U.S. red lines led Beijing to proceed with large-scale land reclamation activities in late 2013 and 2014. One Chinese scholar this author interviewed who was often in conversation with the then South China Sea section of China's State Oceanic Administration noted that "China first started reclamation at the Johnson South Reef and was watching the reaction from the international society carefully; it proceeded with large-scale reclamation after realizing that there was not much of a reaction internationally."[5] By "international," this interviewee meant the United States. The U.S. response in 2014 was relatively muted: Washington did not call out China's land reclamation from the outset. Instead, the White House and, importantly, President Barack Obama himself remained silent.

Obama's second term, however, saw the drawing of clearer red lines. During the November 2015 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Manila, Obama called on China to halt its land reclamation activities in the South China Sea.[6] He subsequently warned Beijing in March 2016 that there would be "serious consequences if China reclaimed land

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4 Zhang Jie and Zhong Feiteng, ed., *2013 nian Zhongguo zhoubian anquan xingshi pinggu* [The 2013 Assessment of China's Regional Security Environment] (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2013), 19.

5 Author's interview, Guangzhou, China, May 25, 2016, cited in Ketian Zhang, "Explaining China's Large-Scale Land Reclamation in the South China Sea: Timing and Rationale," *Journal of Strategic Studies* (2022).

6 Ketian Zhang, "A View from the United States," Asan Forum, National Commentary, April 30, 2019 ~ https://theasanforum.org/a-view-from-the-united-states-6.

at the Scarborough Shoal."[7] Local Chinese government documents from 2013 noted explicitly that China would implement land reclamation on the Scarborough Shoal.[8] Yet following Obama's 2015–16 warnings, subsequent government documents cease to mention reclamation on the Scarborough Shoal. This suggests that without the clear red line from the United States, it is quite plausible that China would have proceeded to reclaim the Scarborough Shoal, making this episode a successful case of U.S. deterrence.

The Trump administration pressed Beijing to halt militarization of the South China Sea, but Trump himself did not issue a clearly stated red line. This lack of clarity could have had adverse effects. Chinese analyst Hu Bo, who has extensive connections with the People's Liberation Army, has argued that compared with the Obama era, the Trump administration lacked strategic intent and clarity regarding the South China Sea.[9] In short, China is sensitive to whether U.S. red lines are well-defined and bases its actions on calculations of U.S. resolve.

The Dilemma over Signals of Resolve: Avoiding Excessive Media Exposure

For deterrence to be successful, signals of resolve should not draw excessive media attention. This author's past research indicates that when media salience of an event is high, China tends to view its own reputation for resolve as being on the line, which leads Beijing to use coercive measures to demonstrate resolve in maritime disputes.[10] As such, successful deterrence is a balancing act—providing clear signals of resolve that do not invite media attention. Examples of potentially effective deterrence range from private statements of resolve communicated to the Chinese side to physical actions such as joint exercises and even joint freedom of navigation operations. To reduce media attention, these joint exercises and freedom of navigation operations should be regularized so that they become no longer media-worthy but still send strong signals to China. Otherwise, highly publicized but merely window-dressing exercises may lead to a "resolve dilemma" in which the United States takes actions to deter China and China feels the need to demonstrate resolve in response.

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7 Zhang, "A View from the United States."

8 Zhang, "Explaining China's Large-Scale Land Reclamation."

9 Ibid.

10 Zhang, "Cautious Bully."

Divergent Interests: Why the Quad Is Ineffective for Sino-Indian Border Disputes

In addition to clear signals and reduced media attention, the stakes involved are highly pertinent to successful deterrence. Relevant parties need to have both interest in and commitment to deterring specific actions from China. The Quad—a strategic dialogue between the United States, Japan, Australia, and India—and its recent developments leave much to be examined regarding the success of signaling and capability aggregation. Despite its re-emergence since 2017, the Quad has not changed China's calculation regarding the geopolitical costs—real and potential—associated with Sino-Indian border disputes, demonstrating the group's broader failure to shift China's strategy on territorial issues. This section draws its evidence from the writings of and interviews with former Chinese diplomats and Chinese policy analysts who have close ties to the Chinese government.

As shown in the author's work elsewhere,[11] in 2018, Wu Zhenglong, a retired Chinese ambassador, stated that he doubted the utility of the Quad because "India, Japan, and Australia all have divergent interests that differ from U.S. interests." Wu reiterated what other interviewees and analysts noted: China believes that India is pursuing a hedging strategy and will not seek a formal alliance with the United States.[12] In a 2020 interview, former Chinese diplomat to India Lin Minwang similarly doubted the U.S. commitment to a closer security relationship with India, believing India would burden the United States.[13] Senior India specialist Ma Jiali from the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, a government think tank under China's state security apparatus, noted that despite the existence of the Quad, differences and frictions between India and the United States persisted, including over trade, Indian weapon purchases from Russia, and U.S.-Pakistan relations.[14] As long as these thorny issues are not resolved, Ma believed it would be difficult for the United States and India to pursue a deeper relationship. When asked about the recent

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11 Ketian Zhang, "Explaining Chinese Military Coercion in Sino-Indian Border Disputes," *Journal of Contemporary China* (2022) ~ https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10670564.2022.2090081.

12 Wu Zhenglong, "Meiguo Yintai zhanlue nengzou duoyuan?" [How Far Can America's Indo-Pacific Strategy Go?] China-U.S. Focus, August 2, 2018 ~ http://cn.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/20180802/31151.html.

13 Hong Sha, "Zhuanfang Lin Minwang" [An Exclusive Interview of Lin Minwang], Deutsche Welle, January 7, 2020 ~ https://p.dw.com/p/3eaCn.

14 Ma Jiali, "Telangpu fangYin yu ZhongYiMei guanxi" [Trump's India Visit and Sino-India-U.S. Relations], China-U.S. Focus, March 4, 2020 ~ http://cn.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/20200304/41778.html.

military standoff between China and India along the border, one analyst at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences dismissed the Quad's effectiveness, reasoning that the Biden administration has limits to its India policy, while India is also cautious about certain aspects of U.S. policy.[15]

These views are shared by Chinese analysts from various other government think tanks and among senior Chinese scholars.[16] The author's participation in a Track 2 dialogue in 2021 confirmed that Beijing largely maintains the belief that U.S.-India relations will not be smooth.[17] One retired senior Chinese military official was dismissive of the concept of the Quad, stating that it focused more on nontraditional security issues such as vaccine distribution, whereas another senior military officer noted that India was "lukewarm" to the idea of the Quad. This latter sentiment appears to be shared by U.S.-based India watchers.[18] In short, the Quad has not changed China's view that the United States and India will not establish a formal alliance, which would potentially increase the risks to China of military escalation in Sino-Indian border disputes. Although the media has attached immense significance to the restart of the Quad and its subsequent meetings, from China's perspective, there is still a long way to go before the United States and India establish anything resembling a formal alliance.

In short, the Quad can be useful, but only if all parties involved share similar interests and place the same importance on issues such as territorial disputes, which can be challenging to achieve in practice. India has less at stake than the United States in the South China Sea or East China Sea disputes. Additionally, neither Japan nor Australia shares the same concern as India regarding the Sino-Indian land border disputes. As illustrated by the Sino-Indian border case, China perceives too many differences among Quad members for this mechanism to be an effective deterrent. Some evidence suggests that this assessment might be correct. In early January 2022, for

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15 Zou Zonghan, "ZhongYin tanpan zaixian jiangju Meiguo keneng banyan de juese" [Sino-Indian Negotiations Are Stalled and the Possible Roles the United States Can Play], Deutsche Welle, January 25, 2021 ~ https://p.dw.com/p/3oMRs.

16 Zhao Huasheng, "Dui Yintai zhanlue qianjing de panduan" [An Assessment of the Prospect of the Indo-Pacific Strategy], Tsinghua University, Center for International Security and Strategy, May 6, 2021 ~ http://ciss.tsinghua.edu.cn/info/china_wzft/3506; Zhang Hualong, "Yindu hui peihe Meiguo, ezhi Zhongguo ma" [Will India Cooperate with the United States to Contain China?], *Liangwang zhiku*, October 19, 2019 ~ http://www.china.com.cn/opinion/think/2019-10/19/content_75318037.htm; and Liu Aming, "Sifang anquan duihui de xinfazhan ji qianjing tanxi" [An Assessment of the Development and Prospects of the Quad], *Guoji zhanwang*, no. 1 (2021).

17 These impressions are from a closed-door Track 2 dialogue with Chinese and U.S. counterparts, hosted virtually by the Grandview Institution on March 15, 2021.

18 See, for example, Ankit Panda, "Modi's 'New India' and the U.S.-India Relationship: Turbulence Ahead?" *Diplomat*, December 18, 2019 ~ https://thediplomat.com/2019/12/modis-new-india-and-the-us-india-relationship-turbulence-ahead.

example, China joined Japan, Australia, and a raft of other countries in a new Asia-Pacific trade agreement, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).[19] The United States is not part of the RCEP, suggesting divergent interests between the United States and its allies, including two of its Quad partners.

Conclusion

China poses serious security challenges to the Indo-Pacific region, as illustrated by its assertive behavior in territorial disputes in the South China Sea and along the Sino-Indian border. These challenges, especially as they pertain to maritime disputes, make it more difficult for traditional deterrence to succeed. For example, coercive gray-zone measures in maritime disputes act as "salami slicing" tactics, which makes them difficult to deter. The United States and its allies have trouble responding "in kind"—it is operationally challenging to utilize the gray-zone equivalent with U.S. and allied forces. Moreover, China's rationale for using gray-zone coercion, such as with its coast guard vessels and maritime militia, is that these measures are less likely to escalate into militarized conflicts with the United States.[20] However, as retired U.S. Navy admiral Scott Swift has indicated, the U.S. military does not view gray-zone measures as intended to de-escalate a conflict.[21] As such, this mismatched perception between China and the United States means that even the use of nonmilitary coercion can be dangerous in maritime disputes.

For deterrence to be successful, then, the United States and its allies must send clear signals of resolve. However, these signals should not attract excessive media attention, or they may pressure Beijing to demonstrate its own resolve. Instead, private statements and regularized military exercises may be more effective. Finally, minilateral groupings such as the Quad cannot be effective unless member states reduce or resolve their divergent interests. The United States and its allies need to seriously discuss their stakes, perceptions, interests, and willingness to engage on various issues, whether it is a Taiwan flashpoint or a Sino-Indian border dispute. ◈

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19 Yuka Hayashi, "U.S. on Sidelines as China and Other Asia-Pacific Nations Launch Trade Pact," *Wall Street Journal*, January 1, 2022 ~ https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-on-sidelines-as-china-and-other-asia-pacific-nations-launch-trade-pact-11641038401.

20 Ibid.

21 Ketian Zhang, Scott Swift, and Susan Thornton, "Chinese Coercion in the South China Sea," interview by Morgan L. Kaplan, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, IS: Off the Page, podcast audio, November 14, 2019 ~ https://is-off-the-page.simplecast.com/episodes/02-chinese-coercion-in-the-south-china-sea-_L8DRkpA.

The Quad as a Security Actor

Tanvi Madan

When the Quad briefly emerged in 2007–8 among Australia, India, Japan, and the United States, this minilateral was referred to as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. Although some member states occasionally still use that term—often casually—it has been eschewed as a formal designation. Indeed, Quad members have gone out of their way to highlight a softer purpose rather than a security framing for the coalition. They have emphasized the idea of the group as a solutions provider for regional problems, including the Covid-19 crisis and climate change, while simultaneously officials have either denied or downplayed the grouping's security dimension.[1] In September 2021, for instance, a senior U.S. official emphasized that the Quad "is not a regional security organization." The official further added that "there is not a military dimension…or security dimension" to the grouping.[2]

However, while the Quad is not a regional security organization or alliance and does not involve formal security commitments or treaty obligations, it does have security and even some military dimensions. This element may not be evident in members' public statements, but as this essay argues, it is a key component of the Quad and the cooperation between its members.

The Quad's resurrection lay in the need to respond to a security challenge—a more assertive and powerful China. This was not the only driver, but without it, the Quad was neither necessary nor possible. The member states' desire to respond to this challenge by shaping a

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1 "Remarks by President Biden, Prime Minister Modi of India, Prime Minister Morrison of Australia, and Prime Minister Suga of Japan in the Virtual Quad Leaders Summit," White House, March 12, 2021 ~ https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/03/12/remarks-by-president-biden-prime-minister-modi-of-india-prime-minister-morrison-of-australia-and-prime-minister-suga-of-japan-in-virtual-meeting-of-the-quad; and "Joint Statement from Quad Leaders," White House, September 24, 2021 ~ https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/24/joint-statement-from-quad-leaders.

2 "Background Press Call by Senior Administration Officials Previewing the Quad Leaders Summit and Bilateral Meeting with India," White House, September 24, 2021 ~ https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2021/09/24/background-press-call-by-senior-administration-officials-previewing-the-quad-leaders-summit-and-bilateral-meeting-with-india.

favorable balance of power and building resilience in the region has led to several lines of effort, including in the defense and security domains. Among other elements, these interactions have involved building on a relatively low base of member-state interconnection in these sectors, particularly with India. Members' engagement in these realms has been evident in three areas: (1) security consultations and activities via the Quad, (2) sub-Quad activities, involving the deepening of ties between the Quad partners bilaterally and trilaterally, and (3) supra-Quad activities, consisting of member-state cooperation with other like-minded partners.

The China Driver

The Quad re-emerged in 2017 in the context of Beijing's increasing assertiveness, particularly in the Indo-Pacific. Each of the member states had growing concerns about China's intentions, expanding capabilities, and footprint, as well as the region's vulnerabilities. In addition, it was neither feasible nor desirable for strategic, economic, or political reasons for any of these countries to tackle the China challenge alone. The regional security architecture was also underdeveloped and unequal to the task, while U.S. bilateral alliances and regional partnerships were insufficient to deal with the challenge, as were international organizations. Moreover, some of the United States' allies did not share either the same concerns or its risk tolerance toward China—and those that did were linked through a hub-and-spoke alliance system that connected each ally with the United States but not closely with one other. Finally, although it was a like-minded ally, Japan, for largely historical reasons, had been a reticent and limited security actor, while India, a key country that also shared concerns about China—and was willing to do something about the challenge—stood outside the U.S. alliance system.

These willing and capable countries felt a need to broaden and deepen their consultation, coordination, and cooperation to help address the challenge that China posed. For Australia, Japan, and the United States, a collective security solution might have been the answer, but not for non-ally India. The next best option, to tweak Charlie Lyons Jones's framing, was collaborative security.[3] Enter the Quad.

[3] Charlie Lyons Jones, "Why the Quad Should Focus on Collaborative Not Collective Defence," Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Strategist, February 16, 2021 ~ https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/why-the-quad-should-focus-on-collaborative-not-collective-defence.

Since 2017, with a shared (though not identical) threat assessment in the region vis-à-vis greater Chinese assertiveness, several of the Quad's activities seem to be devised around two lines of effort: shaping a favorable balance of power so that a unipolar, China-dominant Asia does not emerge, and building resilience in the region. Both have involved an element of bolstering individual member capacity, their collective capacity as a minilateral grouping, and regional capacity to detect, deter (including through denial), and defend against challenges in a range of domains, especially maritime and critical and emerging technologies.

Within these two lines of effort, the group's defense and security ties and activities have also developed. This evolution has not just been under the guise of the Quad but also crucially has involved the thickening of members' bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral ties that has enabled—and will continue to enable—the four countries to cooperate more effectively.

Activities via the Quad

The Quad has served as a forum for the member states to engage in regional security consultations at the highest levels, including (and especially) on China. U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan, for instance, acknowledged that at the March 2021 virtual summit, the Quad leaders discussed "the challenge posed by China, and they made clear that none of them have any illusions about China." He further outlined that the conversations covered crises the countries were facing, such as the cyberattacks against all four members, as well as Chinese actors' "coercion of Australia, their harassment around the Senkaku Islands, [and] their aggression on the border with India."[4] The Indian foreign secretary has noted that "contemporary" regional security issues are regular items on the agenda. Over time, official documents have highlighted that these have included the Indo-Pacific, Afghanistan, and Myanmar.[5] Additionally, a Quad meeting in March 2022 gave the leaders a platform to discuss the implications of the Russian invasion of Ukraine for the Indo-Pacific.[6]

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4 "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan," White House, March 12, 2021 ~ https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2021/03/12/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-jen-psaki-march-12-2021.

5 "Transcript of Special Briefing on First Quadrilateral Leaders Virtual Summit by Foreign Secretary," Ministry of External Affairs (India), March 12, 2021 ~ https://mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/33656/Transcript_of_Special_Briefing_on_First_Quadrilateral_Leaders_Virtual_Summit_by_Foreign_Secretary_March_12_2021.

6 "Joint Readout of Quad Leaders Call," White House, Press Release, March 3, 2022 ~ https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/03/03/joint-readout-of-quad-leaders-call.

Such discussions now take place at various levels and via different mechanisms, such as annual ministerials, twice-yearly senior officials' meetings, working groups, and expert engagements. These meetings are useful for sharing assessments and approaches, coordinating responses, and managing differences. An added benefit is that these conversations are building familiarity and a network among the political and bureaucratic leadership on all four sides.

In addition to these broader discussions, many specific areas of consultation and cooperation between the Quad countries involve critical security components in domains such as maritime security, technology, supply chains, cybersecurity, counterterrorism, countering disinformation, and space. Some of these components involve defense-related discussions, but there is also a cluster of issues that revolve around economic security that focus on tackling the current or potential use of Chinese economic coercion to shape countries' strategic choices. Significantly, there is also greater engagement between the four countries' intelligence agencies, including via a Quadrilateral Strategic Intelligence Forum that met in September 2021.[7] This is particularly striking given India's historic discomfort with engaging in this domain with the United States and its allies.

Beyond consultations, some collaborative activities have taken place. These have included one-off initiatives, such as New Delhi hosting a tabletop counterterrorism exercise in November 2019.[8] A major focus, though, has been maritime security. This has been most evident in the Malabar naval exercise, which for two years now has involved all four member states, although Indian officials continue to formally delink it from the Quad. Efforts to improve interoperability and maritime domain awareness are also expected to remain a priority.[9] In addition, the U.S. secretary of defense has noted that the grouping's new humanitarian assistance and disaster relief mechanism will involve cooperation between not only civilian agencies but

7 Greg Sheridan, "The Man Bringing National Security Out of the Shadows," *Australian*, December 23, 2021 ~ https://www.theaustralian.com.au/inquirer/the-man-bringing-national-security-outof-the-shadows/news-story/3a21deec885d891562c4e6fb54810888; and Matthew Cranston and Chris Uhlmann, "Australian Spy Chiefs in 'Full Court Press' to Sell AUKUS," *Financial Review* (Australia), September 24, 2021 ~ https://www.afr.com/policy/foreign-affairs/australian-spy-chiefs-in-full-court-press-to-sell-aukus-20210923-p58u98.

8 "India to Host 1st Counter-Terror Exercise for Quad Countries," *Tribune* (India), November 19, 2019 ~ https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/india-to-host-1st-counter-terror-exercise-for-quad-countries-2445.

9 "Background Press Call by Senior Administration Officials on President Biden's Meeting with Prime Minister Kishida of Japan," White House, January 21, 2022 ~ https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/01/21/remarks-by-president-biden-on-increasing-the-supply-of-semiconductors-and-rebuilding-our-supply-chains-2.

defense agencies as well.[10] The Quad has also announced a new initiative intended to enhance maritime domain awareness across the region.[11] Moreover, as discussed below, Quad member states are undertaking additional cooperative activities in the maritime security domain with each other as well as with like-minded partners.[12]

Sub-Quad Activities

Joint Quad activities have buoyed ties between the four states, but Quad security cooperation, in turn, has been greatly facilitated—indeed, even made feasible—by the bolstering of bilateral defense and security ties between members. For instance, Australia's inclusion in Malabar would not have materialized without the development of a closer Australia-India bilateral relationship, especially in the defense and security domains. The member states' interlocking trilaterals have helped as well, and maritime security has also been a key focus of Australia-India dialogues with France and Indonesia.

The bilaterals have been particularly instrumental by developing the "hard infrastructure" (foundational agreements that facilitate logistics sharing, intelligence sharing, and interoperability) and the "soft infrastructure" (habits of cooperation, informal networks, and crisis communication and coordination) that make current and future Quad security ties possible. Bilaterals have also arguably been helpful in facilitating Japan's and India's willingness and ability to deepen Quad security ties. Quad engagement, in turn, has helped bolster bilateral efforts. For example, Tokyo's more proactive security role has involved enhancing its defense and security ties with Canberra, New Delhi, and Washington over the last few years (such as through Japan and Australia signing a reciprocal access agreement in January 2022). Indeed, these three Quad member states have been at the forefront of encouraging and enabling a more robust Japanese approach. Such bilateral ties have also helped incorporate India into a

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10 "Secretary Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III, Indian Minister of External Affairs Dr. S. Jaishankar, and Indian Minister of Defense Rajnath Singh at a Joint Press Availability," U.S. Department of State, Press Release, April 11, 2022 ~ https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-austin-indian-minister-of-external-affairs-dr-s-jaishankar-and-indian-minister-of-defense-rajnath-singh-at-a-joint-press-availability.

11 Zack Cooper and Gregory Polling, "The Quad Goes to Sea," War on the Rocks, May 24, 2022 ~ https://warontherocks.com/2022/05/the-quad-goes-to-sea.

12 "Transcript of Foreign Secretary's Special Briefing on Prime Minister's Visit to USA," Ministry of External Affairs (India), September 21, 2021 ~ https://mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/34292/Transcript_of_Foreign_Secretarys_special_briefing_on_Prime_Ministers_visit_to_USA.

broader security network with the other Quad member states, which today are among New Delhi's closest security partners (see **Table 1**).

In addition to various security mechanisms and agreements, India now also has a range of regular and increasingly sophisticated military exercises with each of the Quad countries. With Australia, India has the biennial AUSINDEX maritime exercise and the Austra Hind Special Forces exercise. With Japan, it has navy (JIMEX), air force (Shinyuu Maitri), army (Dharma Guardian), and coast guard (Sahyog-Kaijin) exercises. With the United States, it has army (Yudh Abhyas), special forces (Vajra Prahar), and air force (Cope India) exercises, as well as a tri-service exercise (Tiger Triumph). The Indian Navy now also conducts regular passage exercises (Passex) with each of its Quad partners between their bilateral exercises. India's higher level of comfort with these partners has been evident in the high-altitude warfare focus of recent iterations of the Yudh Abhyas exercise and in reciprocal deployments of maritime surveillance aircraft with Australia.

TABLE 1

India's Bilateral Defense and Security Ties with Its Quad Partners

	Australia	Japan	The United States
Annual leaders' meeting (in practice)	X	X	X
2+2 ministerial	X	X	X
Military staff talks	X	X	X
Military exercises with all Indian services	X	X	X
Liaison at India's Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region	X	X	X
Maritime security dialogue	X*	X	X
Cybersecurity dialogue	X	X	X
Counterterrorism dialogue	X	X	X
Defense technology discussions	X	X	X
Logistics sharing agreement	X	X	X
White shipping agreement	X	X	X

Note: Asterisk indicates activity also includes Indonesia.

Supra-Quad Activities

Bilateral collaboration and quadrilateral collaboration have, in turn, facilitated and even fueled the countries' cooperation beyond the Quad with other like-minded partners, including in what have colloquially been labeled "Quad Plus" military exercises. In 2021, France hosted the La Perouse exercise in the Indian Ocean region with the Quad countries. And the United States has hosted Australia, India, and Japan for the antisubmarine warfare exercise Sea Dragon, which also included Canada in 2021 and both Canada and South Korea in 2022.[13]

The Quad countries have also increasingly been included in each other's multilateral exercises as participants or observers. For instance, all four countries have participated in the most recent Kakadu and Pitch Black exercises hosted by Australia. All four also partnered in the U.S. Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) and Indian Milan exercises, which involved several other countries as well, with the Quad members being among the few participants that sent fixed-wing aircraft to the 2022 RIMPAC maritime exercise. India is expected to join the others in the next Talisman Sabre in 2023 as a full participant (after being an observer in 2021).[14] Quad members are also joining or observing bilateral exercises that others host. For instance, Japanese observers attended the India-U.S. Air Force exercise in 2018, and U.S. observers attended the 2019 AUSINDEX and the India–United Kingdom tri-service exercise Konkan Shakti in 2021.[15] This increased regularity of exercises involving two, three, or all four members—albeit at varying levels of sophistication—has helped improve interoperability, information sharing, and habits of cooperation. As a result, the four countries could now respond to a contingency, such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami that first brought them together, more effectively.

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13 "Quad Navies Participating in France-Led Exercise in Eastern Indian Ocean Region," *Indian Express*, April 5, 2021 ~ https://indianexpress.com/article/india/quad-navies-participating-in-france-led-exercise-in-eastern-indian-ocean-region-from-april-5-7260225; "Sea Dragon 2021 Kicks Off Between U.S. and Partner Nations," Commander, U.S. 7th Fleet, January 11, 2021 ~ https://www.c7f.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/2468589/sea-dragon-2021-kicks-off-between-us-and-partner-nations; and "Six Indo-Pacific Nations Begin Exercise Sea Dragon," U.S. Navy, January 5, 2022 ~ https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/2889948/six-indo-pacific-nations-begin-exercise-sea-dragon.

14 "MILAN 2022: Invited Countries," Indian Navy ~ https://www.in-milan.in/CountryMap.aspx.

15 "Air Forces of the U.S. and India to Hold Joint Exercise 'Cope India 2019,'" *Economic Times* (India), November 29, 2018 ~ https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/air-forces-of-the-us-and-india-to-hold-joint-exercise-cope-india-2019/articleshow/66868769.cms; Indian Navy, "After a Successful Two Week Long Bilateral Maritime Ex #AUSINDEX2019, Eastern Fleet Bids Farewell to @AustralianNavy Ships Canberra, New Castle, Parmatta & Success with a Promise to Meet Again," Twitter, April 14, 2019 ~ https://twitter.com/indiannavy/status/1117389903203934208?s=20&t=D_tV-RFQX9YklB1WVIB0Hw; and "UK-India Tri-Service Exercise Konkan Shakti," British High Commission, New Delhi, Press Release, October 25, 2021 ~ https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-india-tri-service-exercise-konkan-shakti.

Beyond these defense engagements, Quad Plus diplomatic discussions have taken place on such subjects as the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, Quad members are increasingly coordinating with each other—and with other like-minded parties—in third countries or in regional and multilateral forums as well. There have also been one-offs, such as India and Japan signing on to a Five Eyes' statement on encryption.[16]

The Road Ahead

While the extent and effectiveness of these defense and security activities continue to be debated, overarching them is the Quad's use as a signaling device. Moreover, while the Quad is not the prime security cooperation vehicle for any of its members with the others, there is significant scope for enhancing these ties and additional steps the Quad could take to tackle China's use of force, coercion, and gray-zone operations in the region.

Potential opportunities include holding regular defense and security discussions, considering a dialogue between national security advisers (or their equivalents), deepening maritime security cooperation, coordinating security assistance and capacity-building efforts in the region, exploring coast guard (or equivalent) cooperation, enhancing economic and technological security, developing a crisis-management or rapid-response cell, and enhancing discussions of regional threat assessments, contingency planning, wargaming, joint planning, and even operations, as well as regularizing and enhancing like-minded partners' inclusion in Quad security efforts.

However, the member states' willingness and ability to explore these opportunities, thereby expanding and deepening the Quad's role as a security actor, will depend on several factors. These include their threat perceptions and risk tolerance vis-à-vis China, the nature and extent of Beijing's responses, regional reactions, the level of political and bureaucratic buy-in to the Quad within the member states, assessments of other priorities and mechanisms, and judgments about the grouping's effectiveness, as well as New Delhi's decision on how far and fast to align with the other members. In the months and years ahead, these factors will affect the speed, scale, and scope of Quad security—and particularly military—cooperation. ◈

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16 Catalin Cimpanu, "Five Eyes Governments, India, and Japan Make New Call for Encryption Backdoors," ZDNet, October 11, 2020 ~ https://www.zdnet.com/article/five-eyes-governments-india-and-japan-make-new-call-for-encryption-backdoors.