

## Japan's Approach towards Quadrilateral Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Region

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**Abstract.** The article highlights the peculiarities of Japan's approach to the Quadrilateral Strategic Dialogue, the *Quad*, in the Indo-Pacific region. Tokyo initiated this framework in 2007, when Abe Shinzō proposed establishing permanent cooperation between Japan, the USA, Australia, and India. For several reasons, including the resignation of Abe Shinzō from the post of Prime Minister, the *Quad* ceased to exist. In 2017, Tokyo returned to the idea of reviving the quadrilateral dialogue, seeing this as one of the ways to keep the US focused on the region and balance China's influence. The resumption of quadrilateral cooperation in 2017, in the face of more pronounced contradictions between the members of the *Quad* and China, marked new priorities for Tokyo's regional agenda. Interest in quadrilateral cooperation is closely related to the strategy of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, put forward by Abe Shinzō in 2016, which provides for close political interaction with key players in the region and active infrastructure construction. Government of Suga Yoshihide continued the foreign policy course proclaimed by Abe, and the attention of the Biden administration to the *Quad* gives reason to believe that this area will become a key one in Japan-US cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Participation in the *Quad* is a logical continuation of Japan's close bilateral and trilateral dialogue with the United States, as well as with India and Australia, relations with which are reaching a level that can be characterized as quasi-alliances. At the same time, Japan is interested in the *Quad* not being perceived as an exclusive format that reduces the establishment of the rules of conduct in the region to the will of the

four players. Regarding the *Quad* as a tool to contain China, Tokyo emphasizes the open nature of this framework and seeks to expand the format of interaction that would include the ASEAN countries and European partners.

**Keywords:** Indo-Pacific, Abe diplomatic strategy, Suga, Japan, Quad, China

The year 2017 witnessed the first meeting of officials from the USA, Japan, India, and Australia in ten years; it marked the revival of the quadrilateral mechanism of cooperation – *Quad*. The evolution of contacts within the *Quad* framework signifies that it gradually turns into a sustainable platform of regional cooperation. This article dwells on some aspects of its efforts through the prism of Japan's interests, as well as highlights the role of Japan in the *Quad*. The study raises the question of whether the extent of Japan's adherence to the idea of quadrilateral cooperation is long-term and of how it fits in its foreign policy strategy. It relies on the realistic paradigm of international relations to answer this question, applies the chronological method, content and event analysis. For this purpose, a short review was made of the Quad mechanism origin, the appearance of this idea in Tokyo's foreign policy vocabulary, the role and place of the quadrilateral cooperation in Japan's Indo-Pacific cooperation under Abe Shinzō and his successors, the following prime ministers Suga Yoshihide and Kishida Fumio.

## **Quadrilateral Cooperation: Background**

The history of quadrilateral cooperation dates back to 2004, when Japan, the USA, Australia, and India united their efforts aimed at reconstruction after the tsunami in the Indian Ocean. The group that was set up then had a specific objective and did not provide for long-term cooperation outside its framework. In 2007, Prime-Minister Abe Shinzō put forward a proposal to enter into a quadrilateral strategic dialogue based on the time-tested format. The idea received a positive response

from other participants, and the first and only meeting of the *Quad* at that time was held during the summit of the Regional Forum of the Association of Southeast Asian Countries (ASEAN) in the Philippines in August 2007.

The very fact of political interaction in this format, as well as the Malabar military maneuvers taking place at the same time and involving the *Quad* countries and Singapore received a negative response from China. The reluctance to provoke Beijing finally served as a reason for the format dissolving soon. Australia was the first to announce its secession as the Rudd Government that had come to power refused to head for a confrontation with China as this, in their opinion, went against the nation's interests. Australia was soon followed by India, which lost interest in continuing cooperation. Abe Shinzō resigned in September 2007 and his successor Fukuda Yasuo headed for rapprochement with China; thus, the *Quad* idea was gradually forgotten.

Japan returned to the idea of cooperation in the Indo-Pacific in the autumn of 2007. Giving an interview to the *Nikkei* newspaper in October 2007, Foreign Minister Kōno Tarō raised the idea of reviving the *Quad* format, which would ensure peace in the oceanic space from Asia to Africa.<sup>1</sup> The *Quad* resumed its work in November 2017 after a ten-year interval. The first meeting of senior officials in Manila discussed maritime security, war on terrorism, and reconstruction after natural disasters. The *Quad* proved to be viable this time: several meetings of senior officials were held regularly twice a year as well as three ministers' summits (including the telephone format). The landmark event was the first quadrilateral summit of March 12, 2021, in the format of video conference, which was followed by a personal meeting of the four national leaders in Washington on September 24, 2021. It is expected that summits will become regular and take place annually. The regular agenda of the *Quad* is gradually shaping up. It includes, predominantly,

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<sup>1</sup> Japan to propose dialogue with US, India and Australia. *Nikkei Asian Review*. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Japan-to-propose-dialogue-with-US-India-and-Australia>

issues of non-military security, such as war on terrorism, maritime security, and reconstruction after natural disasters. The two summits of 2021 extended and specified this agenda – they proclaimed partnership in combating COVID-19, climate change, cooperation in the field of new technologies, cyber security, space research, and joint construction of infrastructure. Practical cooperation is mainly concentrated in the areas that China will not perceive as a direct threat.

A new tendency is to include discussions of particular countries into the agenda. Thus, the meetings of autumn 2019 discussed the situation around North Korea, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. The leaders' statement of March 2021 mentioned maritime order in the East and South China Seas, North Korea's denuclearization, the abduction issue and the situation in Myanmar.<sup>2</sup>

The very fact of the *Quad* mechanism's appearance and existence is not perceived straightforwardly. Beijing does not conceal its critical attitude to this mechanism, and the Chinese rhetoric has acquired new tinges over time: while, in 2018, Foreign Minister Wang Yi compared the *Quad* with sea foam that would soon disappear, in 2020, he referred to the *Quad* as the "Indo-Pacific NATO", stressing, thus, that the alliance of the four regional players would pose risk to security in the region [Rej 2020]. The *Quad* is criticized for its attempt to set up a certain exclusive block of states, which promotes the revival of the Cold War rationale. According to Russian Deputy Foreign Minister V. Morgulov, the implementation of the Indo-Pacific concept presents a threat of the fragmentation of common space and enhancement of existing dividing lines.<sup>3</sup>

The appearance of the *Quad* was perceived with suspicion in Southeast Asia and was often interpreted as an attempt to reduce the

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<sup>2</sup> Quad leaders' joint statement: "The spirit of the Quad". 12.03.2021. The White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/12/quad-leaders-joint-statement-the-spirit-of-the-quad/>

<sup>3</sup> Morgulov: Russia and Japan are only at the beginning of their way to peace treaty conclusion. TASS. 4.05.2018. <https://tass.ru/politika/5175651>

role of ASEAN in the region. These suspicions were quite natural, as the USA often de-facto ignored regional institutions regarding the most significant issues and, at best, assigned them a secondary role in discussing security problems [Koldunova 2017, p. 62].

In response, the *Quad* countries started speaking about the central role of ASEAN in cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Statements related to the Indo-Pacific region underline its openness and inclusivity, thus mitigating the negative perception of the *Quad* as the format of elite players. The parties express public support of the ASEAN-centrality principle as well as the “Indo-Pacific outlook” developed by the Association in 2019. There have been precedents of cooperation with other states: when the *Quad* gathered at the climax of the struggle against COVID-19 in March 2020; representatives of New Zealand, South Korea, and Vietnam participated as well.

On the eve of the *Quad*’s September 2021 Summit, two of its participants, the USA and Australia, made a tripartite pact with Great Britain providing for Australia acquiring British nuclear submarines. The effect of this event on the *Quad* received various assessments: some analysts believe that the new partnership will strengthen the quadrilateral mechanism, while others, on the contrary, fear that it will reduce the significance of the quadrilateral cooperation [Rajagopalan 2021].

### **Quad in Japan’s Foreign Policy**

Japan initially came forward as the most active participant of the *Quad*. The first meeting in this format took place in August 2007 at Abe’s proposal. Japan’s foreign policy showed an explicit geopolitical approach during Abe’s first term in office, underpinned by a focus on the diplomacy of values. The Japanese Foreign Ministry developed a concept of the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity aimed at enhancing Japan’s solidarity with countries that shared its values of democracy, market economy, human rights protection, etc. The Arc spread from the Baltic

countries through Central and South Asia, reached Southeast Asia and then went to Australia. Japan intended to cooperate closely with the Arc countries and provide them with financial assistance, if necessary. The fact that the Arc bypassed China and Russia made many observers interpret it as an instrument of containment. Almost concurrently, Japan's statements started reflecting the new understanding of the Asia-Pacific regional frontiers. This referred to the Indo-Pacific concept, or Big Asia (*Kakudai Asia*), so well-established today.

The Indo-Pacific concept, although not at all new (it appeared in the US and Great Britain's strategic insights during the Cold War), first arose during the post-bipolar period in Indian analyst G. Khurana's article devoted to Japanese-Indian cooperation on ensuring safety of sea lines of communication. The article argued that, with India's economic growth, its interests were increasingly tied to maritime communications, thus coinciding with those of Japan, whose vitally important trade arteries go through the Pacific and Indian Oceans [Khurana 2007, p. 140]. The Indo-Pacific concept was soon embraced by Tokyo – it entered the Japanese foreign policy lexicon in 2007. While visiting Delhi, the Japanese Prime Minister made a speech in the Indian Parliament called “Confluence of Two Seas”, in which he emphasized the importance of Japanese-Indian cooperation on the above-mentioned issues.

In September 2007, Abe Shinzō resigned, and his initiatives related to Japan's increased role in ensuring regional and international security receded into the background. Under the new Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo, the concept of the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity gradually ceased to be mentioned as one of the landmarks of Japanese diplomacy. Tokyo also lost its interest towards the *Quad*. The period of thaw in relations with China proved to be short while the policy of the opposition Democratic Party of Japan, which came to power in 2009, for rapprochement with Asia, creation of the East Asian Community, and adopting a policy independent from the USA was a failure, which became evident after the Air Station Futenma scandal and the 2010 crisis in Japanese-Chinese relations. Upon return to power in 2012, Abe revived many undertakings of his first stint as Prime Minister. That

also concerned the further development of views on the quadrilateral cooperation in the region. One day after his victory, Abe's article "Democratic Security Diamond" came off the press. It stated the need to develop a mechanism with corner points being Australia, India, Japan, and the American state of Hawaii to protect the common maritime space stretching from the Indian Ocean to the western part of the Pacific.<sup>4</sup> The concept was, first of all, aimed at containing China, which, in Abe's opinion, tried to turn the South China Sea into "Beijing Lake". The concept did not become part of the official diplomatic agenda and it may rather be regarded as the Prime Minister's personal vision but this does not, however, reduce its importance.

As China put forward the *One Belt One Road* initiative, Japan began a more active search for the ways to meet China's geopolitical and economic rise from East Asia to Middle East and coastal Africa [Galimzyanova 2018, p. 161]. The response to the Chinese project was the buildup of Japan's economic presence in Central Asia, invigoration of diplomacy in Southeast Asia and the growing interest in the African continent. At the TICAD sixth meeting in Kenya in August 2016, Abe explained the provisions of the strategy for the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region, highlighting Asian-African interconnection and prospects for joint prosperity. This strategy with East Asia as the pivotal point also covers South Asia, Middle East, and Africa, where it is planned to launch activities on creating infrastructure, trade, investments, establishing business conditions, development and training of human resources.<sup>5</sup> The Indo-Pacific is characterized as the space where freedom, rule of law, and market economy are respected.

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<sup>4</sup> Abe, S. Asia's democratic security diamond. Project Syndicate. <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/a-strategic-alliance-for-japan-and-india-by-shinzo-abe>

<sup>5</sup> Jiyū de hirakareta Indo Taiheiyo senryaku [Strategy of Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region]. Diplomatic Bluebook. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. [www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/bluebook/2017/html/chapter1\\_02.html#Too3](http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/bluebook/2017/html/chapter1_02.html#Too3)

The three pillars of the Indo-Pacific strategy include:

- Advancement and establishment of the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and free trade;
- Achievement of economic welfare;
- Assurance of peace and stability.

The first is definitely related to China as, according to Japanese analysts, the only player threatening freedom of navigation and the rule of law in the Indo-Pacific oceanic space is China. The second is recognition of the important role of ASEAN. One of the goals of the concept is to enhance solidarity with ASEAN. The reason is not only the geographical factor, with the South China Sea connecting the Pacific and Indian Oceans, but, also, the existing multilateral mechanisms with ASEAN as the core participant (ASEAN Regional Forum, the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN defense ministers' meeting plus, etc.). Japan does not intend to set up new structures of cooperation to pursue its Indo-Pacific strategy but strives to use the existing mechanisms with ASEAN as the axis. As to the third point, Japan puts a special emphasis on the development of Africa. It was no accident that the strategy was articulated at the TICAD conference. It is planned to create economic corridors to connect inland areas and coasts of such countries as Mozambique and Kenya [Okamoto 2019].

The notion of the Indo-Pacific region that was mentioned by Abe acquired new content many years later, as it covers not only India but also more faraway countries up to the African coast. In addition, the strategy relies on Abe's basic foreign policy principles – “diplomacy that takes a panoramic perspective of the world map” and pro-active pacifism. The “panoramic” diplomacy provides for increasing the number of foreign policy partners while pro-active pacifism is aimed at making Japan's participation in international security more visible as well as widening the range of Self-Defense Forces' activities. The outlines of regional orientation inherent in the strategy of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific region is evidently similar to the Chinese *One Belt One Road* concept covering key ports on the Indian Ocean coast and stretching as far as the coasts of the African continent.



It may be stated that Abe's version of the vision of the Indo-Pacific region began to turn more anti-Chinese, reflecting the growing perception of Beijing's efforts as a challenge to Japan's national interests. China's assertive rhetoric, its actions in the regions of the East and South China Seas, its growing economic might, and prospects for enhancement of geopolitical influence as the *One Belt One Road* initiative was being implemented made the Japanese leadership look for new ways of containing its neighbor. After Abe put forward the strategy of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific, the Japanese started speaking about a possible renewal of multi-lateral interaction with the USA, Australia, and India. Yet, the change of administration in Washington faced Abe with the task of keeping the White House's focus on the problems of the region.

In the Japanese analysts' opinion, the idea of turning to the concept of the Indo-Pacific was regarded in Tokyo as a way to breathe new life into Donald Trump's Asia-Pacific policy. The President repeatedly mentioned the Indo-Pacific region during his first Asian tour. Japan's interest consisted in preventing Washington from neglecting problems of regional security given the general tendency of the Republicans for isolationism, reduction of the US role in Asian affairs, and apprehensions that China's influence in the region may exceed that of the USA. Japan was keen on enhancing its leadership in the region, which is testified by its active diplomacy, relations with Southeast Asian countries included, as well as Abe's resolute stance on disputed issues with neighboring states and his initiatives for supporting security in Asia.

Tokyo noted that President Trump's speeches mentioned the Indo-Pacific concept, which Prime Minister Abe had referred to before. Analysts concluded that, unlike the standard algorithm of action, the USA tried to adjust to Japan, rather than vice versa [Miyake 2018].

The *Quad* statements advance the ideas of common interest as well as values, which provides for wide interaction. Although Japan was initially building its Indo-Pacific strategy around the notions of "free" and "open", its political lexicon soon saw the appearance of the term "inclusivity", mainly under the influence of India, which

insisted on such understanding of regional cooperation. Abe Shinzō stated repeatedly that the concept was not aimed at containing China; he even considered it possible to include China into the Indo-Pacific cooperation, should it wish so. Tokyo declares its readiness to interact with all countries adhering to the principles of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific: the *Quad* and the ASEAN participants, as well as European countries are included into this interaction today. According to Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu, the Free and Open Indo-Pacific region enables all countries adhering to the basic values of freedom, democracy, rule of law, and freedom of navigation to participate,<sup>6</sup> yet it can be assumed that Tokyo is not likely to see China among these countries.

Suga Yoshihide, who came to power in September 2020, followed his predecessor's foreign policy in most respects. At his first press conference on September 16, 2020, he mentioned the strategic promotion of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific as one of the goals of his diplomacy. This relates to the cooperation within the *Quad*, which retained importance in the Japanese regional policy and in the Japan-US dialogue. The *Quad* summits were held during Suga's premiership; he attended the second one a few days before his resignation, thus demonstrating his adherence to this forum's contribution and drafting a blueprint for his successor for the future.

The September 2021 summit of the *Quad* was held in parallel to the formation of the new defensive alliance of the USA, Australia, and Great Britain (AUKUS). Suga welcomed the new partnership at the *Quad* meeting and stressed its role in assuring peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>7</sup> The emergence of such mechanism, from Japan's viewpoint, raises the potential of containing China in the Indo-Pacific

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<sup>6</sup> Press conference by Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu. 6.10.2020. MOFA Japan. [https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/kaiken/kaiken4e\\_000852.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/kaiken/kaiken4e_000852.html)

<sup>7</sup> Quad leaders press for free Indo-Pacific, with wary eye on China. 24.09.2021. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/quad-leaders-meet-white-house-amid-shared-china-concerns-2021-09-24/>

Region – without Japan's military participation among others, which might have had a negative effect on its relations with the PRC as its most important trade partner and might have been taken negatively by the Japanese public. Japan established close relations in the field of security with all three members of AUKUS, as they all share concern over how the situation develops in the Indo-Pacific region. As to the *Quad*, it is likely to preserve its role of a political and economic counterbalance to the Chinese influence, which is in conformity with Japan's national interests

### **Infrastructural Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Region**

While political cooperation with the *Quad* countries for Japan is predominantly associated with the solidarity front created against China, its economic aspect follows the purpose of expanding export of infrastructure to other countries. Infrastructural construction, including increased export of Japanese infrastructure, was one of the pillars of Abe's economic policy. Back in 2013, an expert commission on infrastructural strategy development was set up; this course acquired momentum with the emergence of China's *One Belt One Road* initiative. In May 2015, Abe announced the Initiative of Quality Infrastructure and appropriated some \$110 billion for reconstruction and modernization of various facilities in Asia. A year later, it was transformed into the Extended Partnership of Quality Infrastructure, which increased the amount of support to \$200 billion and covered not only Asia but also Africa and the southern part of the Pacific. While Japan is not likely to compete with the Chinese project alone, the integrated effort of the *Quad* countries will provide more magnitude to its foreign infrastructural construction. This cooperation will be able to give substance to the format of quadrilateral cooperation and make it long-term because it will not be perceived by China as negatively as, for example, cooperation in the military and security spheres.

Infrastructural cooperation in third countries has been on the agenda of Japan's relations with the *Quad* countries for several years. Trump and Abe repeatedly expressed their intent to cooperate in the establishment of quality infrastructure.<sup>8</sup> During Vice-President Pence's visit to Tokyo, a joint agreement was signed on the promotion of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific region by means of cooperation in the spheres of energy, infrastructure, and digital communications. In November 2016, Abe Shinzō and Narendra Modi put forward the "Asia-Africa Growth Corridor" program aimed at increasing the well-being and interconnection of Asian and African countries; it is projected to allocate about \$40 million towards projects of quality infrastructure, institutional interconnection, training, and capacity building [Dobrinskaya 2019, p. 41].

Currently, there are tripartite agreements on the joint establishment of infrastructure between Japan, India, and the USA as well as between Japan, Australia, and the USA. In September 2017, the meeting of Foreign Ministers of Japan, the USA, and India made a decision to cooperate in the sphere of infrastructure establishment in the Indo-Pacific region, predominantly in the South and Southeast Asia, and in such countries as Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, particularly. It is expected that India will develop port infrastructure, Japan will create industrial parks, and the USA will build power plants. There also exist agreements on infrastructural partnership between Japan, Australia, and the USA.

In November 2018, the Japanese Bank of International Cooperation, the US Overseas Private Investment Corporation, and the Australian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade as well as the Export Finance and Insurance Corporation signed a Memorandum of Understanding that gave rise to the tripartite infrastructural partnership in the Indo-Pacific region. The first project was to be an LNG facility in Papua New

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<sup>8</sup> Japan-US summit meeting. 18.04.2018. MOFA Japan. [https://www.mofa.go.jp/na/na1/us/page3e\\_000845.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/na/na1/us/page3e_000845.html)

Guinea where it was planned to invest \$1 billion.<sup>9</sup> The funding of the \$30 million project for a fiber-optical cable installation in Palau was approved in 2020.

At the 2019 business forum in Bangkok, the USA announced the *Blue Dot Network* initiative providing for certification of projects that conform to the high-quality standards, ecological performance, and transparency; it is supposed to attract investors in funding infrastructure. This program is similar to the Extended Partnership of Quality Infrastructure, advanced by Abe Shinzō, and Australia's Partnership for Infrastructure; the program immediately received approval in these countries, yet its potential was not utilized for a long time. The Biden Administration made a decision to invigorate efforts in this area; June 2021 saw the first meeting of the advising group attended by over 150 business representatives.

The idea of infrastructural cooperation was repeatedly discussed at *Quad* meetings, yet no particular projects have been approved so far. Based on the results of the November 2019 meeting, the four countries agreed to enhance coordination of investment in quality infrastructure in keeping with international standards such as the *G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment*, including strengthening partnership and support for existing regional units. With the Biden Administration's arrival, the US attention to this area intensified: the September 2021 summit announced the launch of the *Quad* new infrastructural partnership, and some specific projects of cooperation may be expected in third countries.

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<sup>9</sup> Alifirova, E. SShA, Yaponiya i Avstraliya v protivovos Kitayu sozdayut sobstvennyi «Poyas i Put'», reshiv proinvestirovat' SPG-proekt v Papua-Novoi Gvinee [USA, Japan, and Australia build their own Belt and Road as a counterweight to China by deciding to invest in LNG project in PNG]. Neftegaz. <https://neftgaz.ru/news/politics/455892-ssha-yaponiya-i-avstraliya-v-protivovos-kitayu-sozdayut-sobstvennyy-poyas-i-put-reshiv-proinvestirov/>

## Japan's Political Dialogue with Quad Countries

In addition to emerging prospects for multilateral infrastructural cooperation with the *Quad* countries, Japan has, for many years, maintained successful cooperation with these countries in the military and political spheres – both in bilateral and mini-multilateral formats.

At the meeting of the Japanese and US Foreign and Defense Ministers in August 2017 – the first after Donald Trump's coming to power – the parties expressed their intention to enhance cooperation in the sphere of security and defense with Australia, India, and Southeast Asian countries. The Japanese side announced an allocation of \$500 million to support programs for assurance of coastal states' maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>10</sup> Whereas Trump's effort and propensity for isolationism made the Japanese uncertain about the US adherence to a Free and Open Indo-Pacific region, Joe Biden's initiatives were, on the contrary, perceived as the return to the habitual division of roles.

Japan became the first country that participated in the "2+2" consultations under the new US Administration, while Suga Yoshihide was the first foreign leader who met Joe Biden. The parties confirmed the classical wording of the alliance being important as the cornerstone of peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region and in the world, the coverage by the Security Treaty of the Senkaku Islands (Diaoyu), and US adherence to Japan's security assurance. The summit resolution contained extremely strong wording related to China, including the situation in the Taiwan Strait, Hong Kong, and XUAR. Tokyo supported the attitude of Washington, which referred to China as the main strategic opponent.

One of the President's initial steps was to hold the first *Quad* summit in history, which allows considering *Quad* as the key element of the new administration's Asian strategy. The attention paid by the White House to the Indo-Pacific region and its intention to play the role of the driving link

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<sup>10</sup> Japan-US security consultative committee. 17.08.2017. MOFA Japan. [https://www.mofa.go.jp/na/st/page3e\\_000714.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/na/st/page3e_000714.html)

in the *Quad* corresponds to Tokyo's interests and is especially important after the resignation of Abe Shinzō, who was enthusiastic in adhering to the concept of quadrilateral cooperation. Suga continued the course initiated by Abe and fully supported Washington's initiatives in the Indo-Pacific region. It is already during their first telephone conversation that the Japanese and the US leaders discussed the idea of holding the *Quad* summit, which was conducted in an online format on March 12, 2021. The statement made by Suga Yoshihide and Joe Biden following their bilateral meeting in Washington confirmed their commitment to work with Australia and India within the framework of the *Quad*, which was "stronger than ever". The agenda of the *Quad* meetings becomes more and more similar to what is discussed in the Japanese-American dialogue. The joint statement by Suga and Biden on the meeting results indicated cooperation in the war on coronavirus; it also launched partnerships in the sphere of climate and technology, which corresponds to the *Quad* lines of effort. Thus, the quadrilateral format and the US-Japan alliance complement and strengthen each other in the field of non-military cooperation.

The rapprochement with India simmering during Abe's first term continues and gains momentum. Abe's foreign policy vision correlated with India's *Act East* policy conducted by Narendra Modi. In November 2016, the two leaders proclaimed the emergence of the new era in their relations based on the combination of Japan's strategy for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific region and India's *Act East* policy [Dobrinskaya 2019]. This cooperation covers nuclear energy, space research, IT, and other spheres of mutual interest.

In November 2016, Japan and India announced their joint intention of implementing the program of the *Asia-Africa Growth Corridor* at the cost of \$40 billion, which provided for projects of quality infrastructure development, institutional interconnection, training, and capacity building. The parties highlight the recipients' financial responsibilities, involvement of local labor force and training thereof, as well as sustainability from the viewpoint of durable use as strong advantages of Japanese-Indian projects over those of China. Unlike a Chinese one,

a Japanese-Indian project focuses on the financial responsibility and does not encourage irrecoverable debts like in the case of Sri Lanka that fell into China's debt trap.

The Japanese-Indian relations in the field of security have recently reached a new level. The countries established close defense cooperation including exchange of secret information and prospects for mutual use of military facilities; they hold multilateral and bilateral maneuvers, and although India follows the non-alignment policy, its positions on many issues related to security are similar to those of the USA and Japan [Dobrinskaya 2019]. The new coronavirus wave made Suga Yoshihide cancel his visit to India, yet he managed to hold a personal meeting before the *Quad* summit, where the leaders confirmed the importance of the Japanese-Indian partnership and adherence to cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

Australia as the USA's military and political partner is a matter-of-course partner of Japan as well; their relations in the sphere of security have broken new ground in the last fifteen years. In 2007, the parties published the Joint Declaration on security cooperation, which gave impulse to bilateral interaction. In 2010, they signed an agreement on reciprocal provision of supplies and services between the Self-Defense forces of Japan and the Australian Defence force (ACSA) and Australia became the second country after the USA that signed such kind of agreement with Japan. In May 2012, the parties signed an Information security agreement providing for an effective exchange of secret data; in July 2014 an agreement on the transfer of defence equipment and technology was signed. The Reciprocal Access Agreement regulates the status of military forces of both countries in each other's territory. Japan and Australia regularly participate in bilateral and multilateral maneuvers as well as maintain intensive military exchanges.

Australia shares Japan's vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific region, which was confirmed during Abe's trip to Australia in November 2018 and Scott Morrison's visit to Tokyo in November 2020. In June 2021, the leaders of the two countries announced the launch of partnership in the



sphere of carbon dioxide emissions reduction through technology, thus bringing the program of cooperation launched by the *Quad* countries in March 2021 to the bilateral level.

In addition to the above-said, the tripartite dialogue mechanisms of the USA-Japan-Australia, the USA-Japan-India, and Japan-India-Australia have long been in action, and so have the meetings of the defense ministers of the USA, Australia, and Japan. The year 2002 saw the first tripartite meeting of senior officials from Japan, Australia, and the USA, and the level of dialogue was raised to ministerial in 2005. The negotiation mechanism of Japan-India-USA has been in existence for several years: the fourth dialogue of senior officials took place in Deli in April 2018, and the leaders of the three countries met in November 2018 and June 2019. The June of 2015 witnessed the first meeting in the tripartite format of Japan-Australia-India. All of this proves that Japan has established close military and political ties with all the *Quad* participants and created pre-conditions for improving multilateral cooperation in the quadrilateral format.

The main constraining factor is the relations of the *Quad* participants with China, which relates to Japan as well. The thesis of the “Chinese threat” has been popular in Tokyo for a long time and, unlike India and Australia, Japan is more consistent in calling for the containment of China. Yet, Tokyo is traditionally pragmatic in combining the policy of China’s involvement into cooperation in Asia and containment of its influence in other regions.

The Japanese-Chinese relations are characterized by the alternation of thaw and cooling periods; rapprochement in the relations between Tokyo and Beijing began against the backdrop of increased American-Chinese and American-Japanese trade contradictions in 2018–2019, but it does not testify to the dramatic change of the foreign policy course.

The reference is more likely made to the limited improvement of Chinese-Japanese relations in mutually beneficial forms, which do not, however, drift into a more significant rapport, with strategic rivalry in the sphere of politics and security in the Indo-Pacific region remaining [Kireeva 2020, p. 41].

## **Opportunities for Partnership in the Indo-Pacific Region outside the Quad**

The Japanese side has repeatedly emphasized that the vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific brings together not only the USA, Japan, Australia, and India but also ASEAN and Europe. Tokyo tries to win ASEAN support for its Indo-Pacific strategy, which invigorates their economic, military, and political interaction.

Japan has been attempting to enhance its security role in Southeast Asia for the last few years. Like Washington, Tokyo provides assistance to ASEAN countries, equipping their coastal guard and providing for more effective control of the maritime space and capacity building in counterbalancing China. It is accompanied by active diplomatic efforts focusing on rapprochement with the countries having territorial contradictions with China.

Relations with the Southeast Asian countries take up a special place in Japan's foreign policy, which was demonstrated by Abe's vigorous diplomacy. It is for this purpose that the then newly appointed Prime Minister's first visit was made to the countries of Southeast Asia – Indonesia, Vietnam, and Thailand. Abe Shinzō managed to visit all the ASEAN countries during his first term and set the tone of active diplomacy in this area. Regular summit meetings resulted in strategic partnership relations being established (for example, with Cambodia and Malaysia) as well as existing partnerships being strengthened (with Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia). Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide made his first foreign trip to Vietnam and Indonesia; the visits resulted in arrangements reached on defense and security cooperation. Apart from the close political dialogue and economic interaction, Japan has recently shown an interest for military cooperation, especially with the countries having territorial contradictions with China [Dobrinskaya 2021, p. 62].

It is important for Japan that ASEAN supports its regional initiatives, as this makes them more extensive and legitimate in the regional public's view; yet it does not reduce them to the Japanese-American alliance

efforts – therefore, Japanese official documents mention the central role of ASEAN in the promotion of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific. Japan welcomed ASEAN unveiling the “Outlook on Indo-Pacific” and hurried to confirm its similarity to Japanese approaches. The defense cooperation agreement under the title of the “Vientiane Vision” advanced by Abe Shinzō contains statements on the combination of the ASEAN “Outlook on Indo-Pacific” with the Japanese strategy of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific as well as the thesis about the ASEAN central role in the Indo-Pacific. The ASEAN-Japan 23<sup>rd</sup> summit of November 2020 adopted a joint statement on cooperation in the spirit of the ASEAN view of the Indo-Pacific.

The problems of security and stability in the Indo-Pacific increasingly appear in the dialogue between Japan and European countries: Great Britain, France, and Germany. The region is evidently attracting more and more attention of the European countries: while, earlier, it was only France that marked its presence in the Indo-Pacific, now, Germany and the Netherlands have also developed strategies for the region. In January 2021, Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu was invited to the EU Council of Foreign Relations to make a speech devoted to the Free and Open Indo-Pacific, which promoted a substantive discussion of regional problems and development by the EU of its own Indo-Pacific strategy in April 2021. Japan and some European countries recorded their intention to cooperate in the Indo-Pacific region on the bilateral level. In August 2017, Japan and Great Britain signed a joint declaration on security cooperation including interaction in the Indo-Pacific. Prospects for interaction in the Indo-Pacific have been indicated in the newly adopted Japanese-French Road Map of new horizons for exclusive partnership and confirmed in the joint statement made by Emmanuel Macron and Suga Yoshihide at their meeting during the Tokyo Olympics. September 2019 saw the first round of the maritime dialogue between Japan and France. Both Great Britain and France participate in the maneuvers or patrolling in the South China Sea. Germany showed its focus on the problems of South China Sea. Thus, for example, the situation

in the South China Sea was under discussion between Abe Shinzō and Angela Merkel during their meeting in October 2014. Speaking at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu emphasized that Japan was interested in creating a network of associates in the Indo-Pacific for the purposes of building a free and open world order based on the rule of law. He also mentioned the countries of the Middle East and Africa in addition to Europe and ASEAN.<sup>11</sup>

This goes to prove that Tokyo strives to widen the range of partners on the basis of common interests associated with the support for the power balance in the Indo-Pacific and neutralization of Beijing's ambitions. It can be said that it tries to create "soft coalitions" with the countries that share its concern over today's trajectory of China's rise, its toughening foreign policy, and possible domineering [Kireeva 2020, p. 29]. This defines Japan's interest for creating a wide front of associates – which could unite it with other players – rather than acting within the isolated format of the *Quad*. The combination of mini-multilateral mechanisms with participation of regional and external players concerned about China's rise seems optimal for Japan.

## Conclusions

The closer quadrilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific advanced by Prime Minister Abe in 2007 has so far taken hold as the strategic approach of Japan's policy in the Indo-Pacific area. Tokyo's promotion of the *Quad* continued the policy of balancing against Beijing: as bilateral contradictions exacerbate, Japan sees the *Quad* as an instrument for containing China's offensive policy. The *Quad* was also regarded by

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<sup>11</sup> Quad should work with ASEAN, Europe, Middle East and Africa: Motegi. Nikkei Asia. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Indo-Pacific/Quad-should-work-with-ASEAN-Europe-Middle-East-and-Africa-Motegi>.

Abe's government as the initiative making it possible to retain the US attention towards the region and, at the same time, to compensate for the risks caused by the possible reduction of American influence in the region by forming the network of like-minded states standing against the excessive increase of China's influence. Positioning Japan as a leading global player, Abe Shinzō initiated "diplomacy that takes a panoramic perspective of the world map" and tried to enhance Japan's leading positions in the world through this initiative. The *Quad* acquired special role in the context of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision proposed by Abe in 2016. First, it may be called a construct enabling Japan to build up its political presence over the vast territory from Asia and the Pacific to the coasts of Africa. Second, the importance of the *Quad* for Japan is defined by the opportunities that open in the case of multilateral infrastructural cooperation, which might allow putting forward a powerful alternative to the *One Belt One Road* initiative. Japan already cooperates with the *Quad* countries in the bilateral and tripartite format; relevant efforts within the *Quad* would significantly enhance this interaction and make it more ambitious.

The Biden Administration's attention towards the *Quad* allows to consider it as a key element of the US policy in the Indo-Pacific, which is in Japan's interests. The *Quad* is, in many respects, a continuation of the Japanese-American alliance efforts; it strengthens its regional role – in the sphere of non-military security as well (for example, humanitarian cooperation, healthcare, and environmental protection). Since its agenda covers the areas that are not directly connected to the US or Japan's opposition to China, it mitigates the concerns of the other *Quad* participants and partners who try to avoid confrontation with Beijing.

The *Quad* format is one of the links in the wide global network of Japan's interaction with the states sharing its concerns about China's growing influence. It strengthens the Japan-US alliance as well as opens prospects for establishing cooperation with like-minded countries that are interested in the power balance in the Indo-Pacific, based on the

alliance and, to a wider extent, on the *Quad* per se. The importance of the *Quad* as a platform of enhancing cooperation rather than an isolated club of a few countries will enable Japan to implement its foreign policy strategy aimed at the soft containment of China.

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