GLOBAL POLICY AND STRATEGY INITIATIVE

Mobilizing for a Free, Open, and Secure Indo-Pacific

A Strategic Reassessment

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Foreword

The rationale for the United States' leadership across a variety of multilateral frameworks since World War II has been to create the conditions in which the United States can do well—and its partners can do well, too. From the founding of the United Nations and the Bretton Woods financial institutions to the formation of NATO and various regional alliances, the overarching philosophy was that US prosperity and security were best secured not in isolation but through a stable, rules-based international order. This vision was guided by an understanding that shared economic development, democratic governance, and open markets were essential not just to preventing the recurrence of global war but to creating a network of partners with common values and mutual interests.

This strategy was not just altruistic—it was deeply pragmatic. Postwar reconstruction efforts such as the Marshall Plan in Europe and similar aid in Japan and South Korea were emblematic of this belief in a symbiotic relationship between American leadership and regional growth. The US took an active role in shaping the postwar order because it recognized that chaos abroad often translated into insecurity at home.

This same basic philosophy was later echoed by former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who—in his visionary 2007 "Confluence of the Two Seas" speech to the Indian Parliament—argued for a broader alignment of democratic maritime powers across the Indo-Pacific. Abe articulated a strategic vision grounded in shared values, open commerce, and the freedom of navigation, seeing these principles as essential to regional stability. His ideas planted the seeds for what eventually became the concept of a "free and open Indo-Pacific"—a framework that would gain traction not only in Japan and India but in Australia and the United States as well.

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Abe surveyed the strategic landscape of the early twenty-first century and saw an opportunity: to bring together like-minded nations—those with democratic values, strong maritime interests, and a commitment to international law—into what would later become the Quad. Originally formed in response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the Quad reemerged in 2017 in response to shifting regional power dynamics, especially the growing assertiveness of the People's Republic of China.

Today, the strategic landscape of those two seas—the Indian and the Pacific—has changed again. At a time when skepticism of inherited institutions is growing, and when many are reevaluating the contributions of these institutions to both prosperity and security, it is prudent to take a step back and consider the original goals behind them. The postwar order, designed largely by the West, is being challenged not just by domestic debates over its utility but by rising powers that reject some of its fundamental assumptions.

The most consequential change has been the rise of China. Over the past two decades, China's economic and technological strength has grown exponentially. At the same time, however, its internal political environment has grown more authoritarian, its diplomatic tone more coercive, and its external ambitions more expansive. China's strategic behavior in the South China Sea, in the East China Sea, and along its border with India demonstrates a growing willingness to assert territorial claims and challenge international norms.

Notably, although conflict with China is not inevitable, Beijing is preparing its society—politically, economically, and militarily—for the possibility of confrontation. This includes restructuring its economy for greater self-reliance, enhancing its military capabilities across all domains, and engaging in nationalist propaganda that frames external threats as justification for internal control. In contrast, the market democracies of the Indo-Pacific are not mobilizing their societies in the same way. Their challenge lies in balancing openness and prosperity with vigilance and preparedness.

Successfully navigating this challenge—while also striving toward individual freedoms, economic development, and democratic governance—is now the core question facing regional partners. It is not just about countering China; it is about preserving a rules-based order that supports a free, open, and secure Indo-Pacific. This triad—freedom, openness, and security—cannot be achieved by any one nation alone. It demands coordination, shared values, and strategic clarity among like-minded partners.

To explore this emerging challenge, the Hoover Institution's Global Policy and Strategy Initiative convened a project early this year aimed at fostering candid, cross-national dialogue. Four deeply respected and independent scholars—each hailing from a different Quad country—were invited to examine the shifting regional security environment and to consider, without deference to government positions, what steps might align with the collective interests of these nations. These scholars approached the problem with the understanding that security at home is increasingly intertwined with security abroad.

This initiative was coordinated by Hoover Institution visiting fellow Arzan Tarapore, whose leadership facilitated a series of substantive meetings and discussions, both virtually and in-person at Hoover's campus in Palo Alto. The resulting dialogue, which unfolded over several months, was not a negotiation between governments but an intellectual collaboration between scholars grounded in their respective strategic cultures and national perspectives.

Their collective diagnosis is important—not only for what it reveals about the current state of the Quad as a political entity but also for the unmet agenda that lies ahead in the region. There is clearly value in a more coordinated strategic posture among the market democracies of the Indo-Pacific. Given a shared vision, that strategic resilience can be built along two paths: One is through the "words" of formal institutions and political decrees; the other is through the "deeds" of quiet on-the-ground diplomatic, economic, and, yes, military cooperation in concrete areas of common interest. In this moment of geopolitical flux, the leaders of the Quad countries must weigh their approach to each. We hope that the work of these analysts can be a guide.

What began in the ashes of global war, and what was reimagined in a 2007 parliamentary speech, must now be recalibrated once again to meet the moment. The challenge is real. The opportunity is just as great.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Indo-Pacific region faces a growing risk of major conventional conflict. China already dominates regional economic relations and, fueled by unprecedented modernization, is establishing itself as the most powerful military in the First Island Chain. Left undeterred, its aggression against its neighbors could trigger a major conflict with the United States, possibly engulfing the whole region.

The United States' policy, meanwhile, is opaque and volatile, prompting many regional countries to question the fundamental precepts of their security policies. Chinese revisionism and American uncertainty collide at various points, most starkly at Taiwan, where China enjoys local military advantages.

Deterring major conflict with China requires that some combination of states must be able to thwart a military attack—a strategy known as "deterrence by denial." Given the likeliest scenarios of conflict and geographic constraints, deterrence by denial would require military capabilities of "precise mass"—that is, large quantities of long-range precision weapons. Such a strategy and such capabilities would benefit greatly from a large coalition of partners.

Australia, India, Japan, and the United States all recognize that they must work together for regional stability. But the Quad's current forms of cooperation are not designed to meet the revisionist challenge.

To deter major conflict, these like-minded partners would ideally add meaningfully to the aggregate military capacity that China must plan against, and they would build the strategic stamina to outlast China in a potentially large, protracted war. Deterrence is not confined to amassing combat power at the specific point of aggression; it extends to general national capacity to resist aggression, in a multitude of active and supporting roles, and the ability to aggregate the efforts of like-minded partners.

Partners can still aggregate strategic power despite uncertainty in political relations. Each partner has a pressing need to mobilize for its own national defense; but accelerating strategic policy coordination would also help to aggregate their efforts, adding political costs and uncertainty to Beijing's calculus. Four areas of coordination could prove especially fruitful: building industrial capacity; reinforcing national resilience; developing the enabling foundations of operational coordination; and establishing defense-planning consultations. This deeper strategic coordination would present China with unprecedented challenges, reducing its willingness to act aggressively.

INTRODUCTION

The Indo-Pacific has changed since Australia, India, Japan, and the United States reestablished the Quad in 2017. Peacetime security concerns, such as illegal fishing and humanitarian emergencies, which have dominated the Quad's security agenda, persist. But they are being dwarfed by a larger challenge—the risk of major conventional war. China's nuclear and conventional military expansion is shifting the regional balance of power. Emboldened by its growing power and the lack of any unified resistance, Beijing coerces its neighbors on all sides, from Japan to the Philippines to India. Left undeterred, its aggression against its neighbors—including but not only Taiwan—could trigger a major conflict with the United States, possibly engulfing the whole region.

No country can manage this risk alone. Australia, India, Japan, and the United States all recognize that they must work together for regional stability and have adapted the Quad for that purpose. But the Quad's existing forms of cooperation were never designed to meet an acute revisionist challenge. Providing international public goods is no longer enough.

Moreover, the Quad may not always be the optimal mechanism for confronting revisionism. As an informal grouping, it requires sustained political support and is vulnerable to political disruptions in any of its bilateral relationships. Despite political disruptions, however, its members maintain core strategic interests in resisting revisionism.

This paper offers a strategic reassessment for Indo-Pacific partners, to suggest priority requirements for effectively confronting revisionism. Deterring major conflict with China requires that some combination of states must be able to thwart an initial military attack and have the strategic stamina to outlast China in a potentially large, protracted war. This would require capable and like-minded partners accelerating strategic policy coordination, especially in the domains of industrial capacity, national resilience, operational coordination, and defense-planning consultations. Such cooperation could occur in multiple different combinations of countries—bilateral, trilateral, quadrilateral, and larger. It could occur both within and outside the established frameworks of the Quad. And it would not prejudge national political decisions over whether to fight at a time of crisis or conflict. But that cooperation would be vital to safeguarding national interests, especially as challenges to regional stability multiply, and would be necessary to deter a major conflict.

THE REVISIONIST CHALLENGE

China is well on its way to establishing strategic primacy in the Indo-Pacific. It already dominates regional economic relations and, fueled by unprecedented modernization, is establishing itself as the most powerful military in the First Island Chain. The military balance will continue to shift in its favor, at least for the next few years, while US and partner modernization efforts start to catch up. Its prodigious capabilities are by now well known, especially its unparalleled array of missiles of all ranges; its naval fleet, the largest in the world, with increasing oceangoing reach; and its heavy emphasis on electronic and cyber capabilities.[1]

At the same time, China's behavior is increasingly brazen. It continues to coerce multiple like-minded partners—for example, its recent incursions across the border into India, continuous encroachments into Japanese territory, and frequent dangerous maneuvers against Australian forces. China has consistently used such coercion against individual neighbors as its preferred method to press its claims and gradually assert its regional dominance. But its tactics of violent intimidation and ratcheting up pressure—especially against Taiwan and the Philippines—could also be a prelude, by design or miscalculation, to open conflict.

China's nuclear capabilities may indirectly embolden its sub-conventional aggression. Its nuclear arsenal expansion and modernization give it a more survivable and potentially threatening arsenal.[2] The United States is likely to lose its long-held nuclear dominance, absent a radical nuclear modernization of its own, possibly even calling into question the robustness of its extended deterrence coverage for allies. Thus, a China more confident it has nuclear coercive options is more likely to be tempted to exploit its conventional advantages to use force.[3]

The ultimate goals of Beijing's policy are unsettlingly opaque. Analysts can reasonably debate whether China seeks hegemony in the region or across the world.[4] But at a minimum, it seeks to displace the United States as the primary power in the Indo-Pacific, by force if necessary. And its policies have changed and will likely remain somewhat dynamic. As its influence grows, so too might its ambitions.

Australia, India, Japan, and the United States are now starting to react. But they, along with the rest of the region, still depend critically on China and pursue diplomatic and commercial engagement, hoping they can escape without a major confrontation. They have therefore not mobilized national power or their populations to meet the challenge with urgency. China's power, influence, and ambitions consequently continue to grow.

AN UNCERTAIN BULWARK

The challenge posed by Chinese and other revisionist powers is so vast that individual states, acting independently and incoherently, will not be able to manage it. The United States has traditionally been the linchpin of regional stability, but even it cannot dispatch the threat alone. As successive US administrations have acknowledged, allies and partners must take more responsibility for regional stability—the US no longer has the capacity to underwrite regional security alone.[5]

However, under the Trump administration, the shape of America's political commitment to Asia is uncertain. Washington is subject to competing impulses of being tough on China while also pursuing mercantilist gains. These policy imperatives are in tension, making US policy opaque and volatile and prompting many regional countries to question the reliability of American partnership, which is fundamental to many states' security policies.

In particular, US economic policy has become a source of friction rather than a source of cohesion. Over the past decade, the US has ceased being the champion of a liberalization

agenda and has shifted instead to an "America First" trade policy that is skeptical of multilateral trade agreements and distributed supply chains. The region increasingly sees Washington's economic policy more as a spoiler rather than an engine of American regional leadership—and China stands to gain even more.[6]

Uncertainty over US policy is amplified because of Washington's leadership role. Regional states, especially but not only US allies and partners, would be more likely to invest in countering Chinese revisionism if US policy were dependable. With an unpredictable United States, however, regional states have strong incentives to compromise with China rather than act collectively against it.

US partners have an array of potential policy options to manage this uncertainty. They could build their own indigenous capacity to act and diversify their security partnerships so they are not as dependent on the United States. This option would also address American concerns about more equitable burden sharing. In parallel, US partners could try to keep engaging the US national security apparatus at a military or bureaucratic level below political leadership. Failing that, they may be tempted to seek a more conciliatory posture toward China. Indeed, many regional states have little choice but to hedge their bets and pursue these options simultaneously.

TAIWAN AND BEYOND

Chinese revisionism and American uncertainty collide at various points, most starkly at Taiwan. Other flash points for major war include the Korean Peninsula, the South China Sea, the East China Sea, and the Himalayas. But Taiwan is the most likely focal point where Chinese revisionism will test the limits of American power—and for that reason, it stands as a useful illustrative planning scenario for strategic coordination.

China has local military advantage in the First Island Chain.[7] In a military confrontation over Taiwan, it will likely have the initiative and will enjoy centralized, and therefore quicker, national decision making. It can quickly concentrate significantly greater force than forward-positioned US forces. China has relatively more weapons stocks to hit relatively fewer targets, whereas the US has relatively low stocks to hit many tactical and potentially homeland Chinese targets. The US will therefore depend critically on allies and partners to offset China's advantages in mass and location.

Seizing control of Taiwan would give China dominance in the western Pacific. Chinese sea and air forces would have unfettered access to the oceans, would be able to isolate Japan, and could exert control over vital shipping lanes. In that case, China would gain significant leverage over all Quad members, which all depend critically on the seaborne movement of energy and trade. It would free up the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to pursue more distant goals, including on its Himalayan border with India, in the waters off Japan, and in Australia's northern approaches. Depending on the circumstances, a Chinese takeover of Taiwan could give it unique influence over global semiconductor supply chains and undermine the credibility of the US force posture and security guarantees across the region.

Military competition currently over Taiwan, however, is only one scenario. It is the sharpest edge of a larger contest for hegemony over the region. China's strategic interests span the Indo-Pacific, and it is developing the capacity to project power from the Persian Gulf to the South Pacific. Therefore, even if the US and China can reach a deal or equilibrium that avoids conflict over Taiwan, they may simply shift the risk of confrontation to another time and place. The central task in buttressing regional stability is to deter a revisionist China, whether over Taiwan or elsewhere.

THE STRATEGIC GOAL: DETERRENCE BY DENIAL

To dissuade Beijing from aggression that would lead to major war, like-minded partners in the region would have to convince it that a planned attack would probably fail. This strategy, known as "deterrence by denial," is more likely to dissuade China than threats to impose punitive costs on China.[8] Such deterrence would require the demonstrable ability to thwart an initial Chinese attack or coercive campaign, as well as the credible ability to mobilize and commit to a protracted general war.[9]

Different partner states are likely to play different roles in these different scenarios. Thwarting an initial attack, or a coercive campaign such as a blockade, would require significant forward-positioned forces, so they can be either resident in theater or moved to contact very quickly. In the case of a Chinese attack on Taiwan, the mass and geographic proximity of Japanese forces would likely make a significant, if not decisive, contribution. Australia's potential contribution would be minor but not trivial. But India would be highly unlikely to commit combat forces in a First Island Chain scenario. Forward-deployed forces that would be critical to preventing a fait accompli, however, would be very vulnerable to Chinese missile attack, so dispersing them would increase the chances that some would survive to continue fighting beyond the initial stages of conflict.

Indeed, deterrence by denial also requires a more generalized ability to fight a protracted war. This may even involve convincing China that a war over Taiwan would not remain short or localized, as Beijing wishes. The United States would have strategic incentives to signal that a local conflict, over Taiwan, for example, would escalate to become a general war, where the US and its global partners could nullify China's local military advantages, bring to bear their greater aggregate power, and set back China's national rejuvenation. In such a context, partners such as India, Australia, and others are likely to play a larger role, as rear bastions to sustain the campaign. Deterrence by denial would then also require the deterring states to demonstrate their national resilience and ability to mobilize for war.

Deterrence by denial would benefit from a broader coalition for several reasons. More partners would create more basing options, both forward-positioned to prevent a fait accompli and dispersed to sustain a larger campaign. Even without increasing the aggregate size of the force, a broader coalition would add political costs and uncertainty to Beijing's calculus. Many countries, including those that would not choose to become belligerents themselves, could play a role in convincing Beijing that it has not adequately set the political

preconditions for an attack. Ideally, however, partners would also add meaningfully to the aggregate military capacity and national resilience that China must plan against. A larger, more capable, and more coordinated array of forces is the most potent way to convince China that aggression would fail.

DEPLOYING PRECISE MASS

Some military capabilities are especially well suited to denying aggression in the Indo-Pacific. In some specific scenarios, such as at the contested India-China border or on the Korean Peninsula, this involves a large presence by ground forces. But in most scenarios in the First Island Chain, denying revisionist aggression would require blunting or destroying an invasion force that seeks to attack an island. Such island targets—whether Taiwan or smaller features in the South and East China Seas—would not have adequate resident forces to repel an invasion, so defenders would have to strike the invasion force with precision from a great distance.

This requires a large quantity of long-range precision weapons. Although many of the required technologies have been fielded and others are being tested, the scale of the operational challenge of combat against China will be unprecedented. The size of the Chinese military will require mass—numbers of weapons systems and especially munitions—that the United States has not needed since the Cold War.

Such "precise mass" would require high-quality and resilient intelligence sensors, large stocks of missiles and drones to strike enemy forces and defend against their strikes, and resilient and redundant information networks to tie all the sensors and weapons together.[10]

Sustaining such combat requires an enormous and enormously complex military system. At its forefront include long-range weapons systems such as strategic bombers, submarines, and strike and air defense missiles. Precision also requires a layered network of sensors, including many in space. Moving distant forces to the battle, and sustaining them, would require vast fleets of transport and logistics platforms, crewed and uncrewed. New technologies such as artificial intelligence may enable more autonomous weapons systems and more adaptable command and control. Despite decades of war-fighting experience, the United States remains just as untested as China in such technology-intensive and large-scale combat operations.

The United States' partners could play a critical role. They could also provide access, basing, and overflight privileges to US and one another's forces. Some large and well-developed bases would allow strike forces—such as US strategic bombers, submarines, and land-based missiles—to operate from relatively long ranges. Smaller, mobile, and dispersed fighting positions are more likely to escape detection or targeting and would be well placed to interdict Chinese naval forces, especially around archipelagic choke points. Such capabilities may not decisively defeat China, but they may be enough to deny it battlefield victory and thereby dissuade it from a revisionist campaign.

ACCELERATING STRATEGIC POLICY COORDINATION

Deterrence by denial and capabilities for precise mass would both profit from a wide coalition of capable partner states. This does not require a military alliance. The Quad is not an alliance, and its members are unlikely to all fight together in a military contingency. However, deterrence is not confined to amassing combat power at the specific point of aggression; it extends to general national capacity to resist aggression, in a multitude of active and supporting roles, and the ability to aggregate the efforts of like-minded partners.

Collectively, Australia, India, Japan, and the United States boast impressive strategic advantages, from geographic position to military capacity to technological and economic vitality. Each partner has a pressing need to mobilize for its own national defense and cannot expect the United States to continue shouldering that burden. But coordinating those preparations would allow these countries to pool resources for priority challenges, while reducing wasteful or duplicative effort. Four areas of coordination could prove especially fruitful: building industrial capacity; reinforcing national resilience; developing the enabling foundations of operational coordination; and establishing defense-planning consultations. This deeper strategic coordination would present China with unprecedented challenges, reducing its confidence to act aggressively.

INDUSTRIAL CAPACITY

To credibly signal the capacity to fight with precise mass, like-minded partners must be able to access a larger quantity of munitions than they can currently.[11] Stockpiles of some munitions will be necessary, because an actually existing arsenal is a more credible deterrent than a hypothetical future arsenal, and because some munitions take so long to produce that they cannot be reconstituted during wartime in any relevant time frame.[12]

On the other hand, building latent production capacity will also be necessary. Militaries will quickly expend stockpiled equipment and will need to adapt quickly to rapidly changing battlefield needs. Therefore, large-scale wartime production will be necessary, but it will likely focus on cheap and attritable systems such as drones and cheap missiles.[13]

There are significant limits to how deeply partners can integrate their defense industrial bases, especially because, for example, Australia has limited industrial potential and India shares only a few weapons systems in common with its Quad partners. But some forms of industrial cooperation may prove fruitful. Partners could, for example, pool their buying power to serve as a guaranteed and predictable buyer for defense innovators and new production facilities. Or they could map out their respective production networks to understand and develop alternatives to Chinese components.

NATIONAL RESILIENCE

Building each state's national resilience will be especially important given the risk—and the deterrent benefits—of a protracted general war. Australia, India, Japan, and the United States

are all acutely dependent on international supplies for critical goods, from energy to medical supplies. National resilience would therefore require either the stockpiling or the assured distribution of such critical materials threatened in conflict.

National resilience also includes domestic political toughness. Public opinion probably matters the most in the United States and Japan. If support for military action collapses in either country, those states would find it untenable to continue fighting a protracted war, allowing China to achieve its revisionist goals. Greater public engagement will be a critical political requirement for every regional state that seeks to deter conflict.

Deterrence and preparation for war requires economic mobilization—in particular, for greater industrial production. If states across the region seek to credibly signal their capacity for endurance, their governments would need to coordinate better with industry to prepare for wartime production. This involves not only fostering technological innovation but providing the domestic industrial policy framework to incentivize investments in larger mass production capacity.[14]

Regional states must also anticipate and prepare for the high human and economic costs of major war. Conflict may incur civilian casualties, as we have seen in recent conflicts in Ukraine, the Middle East, and India-Pakistan. Partner states must not assume that combat will remain confined to a distant theater—war will likely involve the heavy use of standoff strikes, which could cause mass casualties at home. Conflict with China would likely also involve aggressive cyberattacks and possible disruption of space-based communication and navigation systems, potentially causing massive civil disruptions. And it would cause unprecedented economic dislocation, especially if it is protracted. Public opinion risks eroding quickly if a war becomes costly or protracted.

National resilience preparation has a deterrent value because it credibly signals that opponents of revisionism have the resolve to weather inevitable economic and political costs of possible war and to sustain a protracted conflict. They would also be inoculating their countries against Chinese economic coercion.

OPERATIONAL COORDINATION

The Indo-Pacific lacks multilateral military alliances. Some existing bilateral partnerships—for example, between the United States and India, or between Australia and Japan—have deepened recently, with new reciprocal access, logistics, or training arrangements. But regional states are highly unlikely to enter into formal alliances that demand, for example, political obligations for mutual defense or unified command structures. Even arms transfers, especially for sophisticated systems, require a degree of political trust because the recipient remains dependent on the vendor for continuing life-cycle support for decades.

Operational-level coordination between partner military forces, however, is less reliant on trust at the political level. Combinations of capable states, such as Australia, India, Japan, and the United States, are more likely to regain or consolidate military advantage if they can

build the "enabling foundations" of combined military power.[15] The enabling foundations of military power are mission agnostic, as useful for peacetime humanitarian emergencies as for conventional combat. They therefore do not require or imply any political commitment to fight. Rather, they provide usable military capabilities that safeguard national interests in peacetime and augment the deterrent against revisionist aggression.

Coordination on enabling foundations may include, for example, sharing various types of intelligence, which are central to fighting with precise mass. Partners could use existing AI-enabled open-source platforms that allow them to circumvent many of the technical and policy impediments to intelligence sharing. The enabling foundations of combined military power include various levels of interoperability such as the ability to refuel, resupply, and repair equipment at partner countries' facilities. They could include greater access, basing, and overflight privileges, including reciprocal arrangements. They could include longer-term projects, such as the establishment or upgrade of military or dual-use facilities. Over time, such forms of data sharing, interoperability, and reciprocal access could come to represent potent forms of military cooperation.

Partner militaries, including among members of the Quad, are already gradually building habits of cooperation. In most cases, these are in bilateral or trilateral configurations and occasionally quadrilateral. More routine staff- or officials-level interaction to share and deconflict planning could enable other forms of coordination. Such interaction need not entail combined contingency planning, which is exceptionally rare even among closest allies, but could begin, for example, with shared planning for regional security assistance. Each Quad member offers capacity-building assistance to regional states and has ad hoc processes for consulting their partners. But a deliberate and routine process for sharing such plans would more effectively eliminate wasteful duplication, build influence around the region, and reduce scope for Chinese coercion.

Such forms of operational cooperation could have strategic effects. Although they would never mimic a formal alliance, more intertwined partners could come to be seen by revisionist adversaries as a potent "force-in-being" that deters aggression.[16] Individual members would gain the capacity to observe and act across a much wider area. Together, even without any political commitments, they would complicate Chinese planning by posing a latent threat in multiple theaters and at multiple vectors, involving multiple regional states.

STRATEGIC PLANNING CONSULTATIONS

To plan and sustain cooperation on these efforts, from industrial production to military operations, partners would benefit from a more robust strategic coordination mechanism. Quad members do not have symmetrical institutional arrangements at any level—their respective institutions for making defense policy, strategic military planning, and theater-level operations do not have the same authorities and obligations. They may, therefore, need ministerial-level coordination in defense matters, to guarantee each member has the authority to act.[17]

Establishing such a consultative mechanism would allow Australia, India, Japan, and the United States to share, or deconflict, or most ambitiously even coordinate their long-term plans for everything from defense industrial production priorities to military uses of AI. Over time, they would also build the habits of cooperation and trust that would enable more seamless action during a security crisis.

A defense pillar could rest within the existing Quad framework, but it need not. A "4+4" mechanism, in which each Quad member's foreign and defense ministers meet together, may help to reduce some institutional resistance to creating a defense pillar. Alternatively, the countries' senior military leaders or defense ministers could meet separately from existing Quad processes. Either way, routine defense planning consultations would serve to send a strong signal to China of the partners' deepening intent and ability to coordinate on building deterrent capabilities.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL BENEFIT

Some quarters in some countries may blanch at military cooperation among Quad partners. China itself would regard defensive preparations, and especially strategic policy coordination among Quad members, with concern. But Beijing has a track record of reacting most vociferously to political statements it deems hostile, rather than to the steady accretion of capabilities. A more formidable countervailing coalition is more likely to give it pause rather than goad it into hasty military action.

Similarly, some Southeast Asian states have been wary of what they see as overly militarized US policy in Asia.[18] By the same token, many in the region have long depended on US-provided security and acceded to increasing military activities, including new initiatives such as AUKUS, the submarine and advanced-technology agreement between Australia, the UK, and the US.[19] A significant portion of regional sensitivities regarding military cooperation is associated with the Quad brand and would dissipate if such cooperation remained separate from the Quad. Accelerating policy coordination among Quad members must not be the sum total of their engagement with the region, but nor can it be ruled out because of inferred regional sensitivities.

Each Quad member has different advantages and vulnerabilities and different potential roles to play to deter revisionism. Each member has an abiding interest in sustaining productive relations with China. And each, including the United States, will take its own political decision on whether to take up arms in various scenarios of aggression. But none of those caveats need preclude quiet defensive preparations and strategic policy coordination today. Policy coordination, to share complementary capabilities and plan future capacity, is not a favor to a particular partner or a tool for a specific contingency; it would serve the current and future security interests of each Quad member. And it would also serve the interests of the whole region, which craves security in the face of looming revisionist threats.

NOTES

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