
Quad 1.0 to Quad 2.0: Destined to “Dissipate like Sea Foam?”

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This article builds on academic literature that identifies Australia’s decision to leave the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (“Quad”) in 2008 as the primary factor which led to the Quad’s disbandment. It begins by briefly reviewing the Quad’s inception and then employs Neoclassical Realism to analyze the structural and domestic determinants which influenced Australia to pull out of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue 1.0 (2007–2008). By assessing the objectives envisaged by the four parties at the time and the factors which contributed to its early demise, this article also draws attention to the staying power of the revived Quad 2.0 (2017–).

Keywords: Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, Neoclassical Realism, Australian foreign policy

1. Quad 1.0: From Idea to Reality

When queried about the United States’ (US) intention to establish a mini-lateral security network in the Asia-Pacific, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi scoffed that such efforts were destined to “dissipate like sea foam.”¹ To the US and its Asian allies however, the growing incidents of traditional and non-traditional security challenges in the Asia-Pacific necessitated closer cooperation and interoperability. Mini-lateral initiatives such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue—the object of Beijing’s derision in recent

1 Wang Yi, “Foreign Minister Wang Yi Meets the Press,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China*, last modified March 9, 2018, accessed July 4, 2021, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/201803/t20180309_678665.html.

years—have been painted by its constituent members—the US, India, Japan, and Australia—as facilitating the synchronization of their defense and foreign policies to collectively tackle regional security challenges.

This paper delves into the Quad, a contemporary mini-lateral initiative which has oscillated between dormancy and animated dynamism. In 2008, a year after it was formally underway, the initiative crumbled. Nevertheless, by 2017, its former constituents resurrected the Quad. In order to distinguish between the two, we identify Quad 1.0 as the first adaptation which lasted from 2007–2008, and Quad 2.0 as its second avatar which emerged in 2017.

This article builds on academic literature that identifies Australia's decision to leave the Quad in 2008 as the primary factor which led to its disbandment. By employing Neoclassical Realism, we trace the structural and domestic determinants which influenced Australia to pull out of Quad 1.0, thus providing a novel theoretical contribution to existing scholarly research on the initiative's inception and sudden demise. This assessment also draws attention to the staying power of the revived Quad (2.0) and whether the variables which contributed to the dissolution of Quad 1.0 can influence the trajectory of Quad 2.0.

Quad 1.0 did not emerge in a vacuum. The initiative's antecedent, The Tsunami Core Group (2004–2005), arose in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami. It was tasked with coordinating the responses of Australia, Japan, India, and the US in the aftermath of the devastating December 26, 2004 tsunami which was triggered by a 9.0 Richter scale earthquake off the coast of the Sumatra Island in Indonesia. The core group, according to US Ambassador Marc Grossman, was credited for having effectively directed emergency humanitarian responders to locations ravaged by the tsunami as well as in the speedy provision of “dozens of helicopters, cargo ships, and transport planes” to rescue those trapped in inaccessible locations.² The initiative also prevented overlap and duplicative humanitarian aid provision among the core group members. Grossman adds that the initiative was not “just part of an effective response to a humanitarian disaster but also a further experiment in a new way of making diplomacy work in the twenty-first century.”³

The Tsunami Core Group was one of several initiatives which served

2 Marc Grossman, “The Tsunami Core Group: A Step toward a Transformed Diplomacy in Asia and Beyond,” *Security Challenges* 1, no. 1 (2005): 11.

3 Grossman, “The Tsunami Core Group,” 14.

as a springboard for stronger ties between its constituents. It was preceded by the 2002 Trilateral Security Dialogue between the US, Japan, and Australia which generated mini-lateral consultations on countering terrorism in Asia, providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief as well as dealing with the rise of China.⁴ The Trilateral Security Dialogue was followed by the Security and Defense Cooperation Forum in 2007⁵ and the Malabar maritime exercises in September 2007 comprising the US, Japanese, Australian, Indian and Singaporean navies.⁶ Abe Shinzo, then Japanese Prime Minister, proposed the continuation of close cooperation through an alternative institutionalized apparatus—the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.⁷ The Quad was expected to strengthen ties between “like-minded states” which share democratic values,⁸ reinforce multilateral cooperation to tackle traditional and non-traditional security challenges, as well as facilitate discussions on potential measures that can be adopted to balance against the rise of China.⁹

Consultations between US Vice President Dick Cheney, Australian Prime Minister John Howard, Japanese Prime Minister Abe, and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh laid the foundation for the mini-lateral’s inception.¹⁰ The first Quad summit took place on the sidelines of the ASEAN

4 “Trilateral Strategic Dialogue Joint Statement,” *US Department of State Archive*, March 20, 2006, accessed August 21, 2021, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2006/63411.htm>.

5 Tomohiko Satake, “Shaping the Future: The US-Japan-Australia Strategic Triangle,” 11th Berlin Conference on Asian Security, Berlin, last modified September 7-8, 2017, accessed August 21, 2021, https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/arbeitspapiere/BCAS2017_Paper_Tomohiko_Satake.pdf.

6 Mahmud Ali, “New ‘Strategic Partnership’ against China,” *BBC News*, last modified September 3, 2007, accessed August 21, 2021, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6968412.stm.

7 Kevin Rudd, “The Convenient Rewriting of the History of the ‘Quad,’” *Nikkei Asian Review*, last modified March 26, 2019, accessed May 4, 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/The-Convenient-Rewriting-of-the-History-of-the-Quad>.

8 Kurt Campbell, Nirav Patel, and Vikram Singh, *The Power of Balance: America in Asia* (Washington D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2011).

9 William Tow, “Minilateral Security’s Relevance to US Strategy in the Indo-Pacific: Challenges and Prospects,” *The Pacific Review* 32, no. 2 (2019): 232–244.

10 Ashok Rai, “Quadrilateral Security Dialogue 2 (Quad 2.0) – A Credible Strategic Construct or Mere ‘Foam in the Ocean’?,” *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India* 14, no. 2 (2018): 138–148.

Regional Forum in 2007¹¹ with discussions revolving around humanitarian and disaster relief operations as well as Asia-Pacific military and strategic developments in the backdrop of China's rise.¹² At the time, the initiative was expected to add an extra layer of cooperation to the US bilateral hub-and-spoke alliance system by bolstering the regional security order as well as helping monitor, and where necessary "collectively" counter, aggressive Chinese behavior in the maritime sphere.¹³ Given the conspicuous benefits of the initiative, why did Canberra withdraw from Quad 1.0 in 2008?

2. The Dissolution of Quad 1.0

2.1 Kevin Rudd: Faint at Heart?

Regional organizations are often spurred into action following a significant regional or global event. The fall of Saigon and the rise of a "Communist Vietnam" in 1975 served as a catalyst for the first ASEAN Heads of State summit in 1976, nine years after the organization was formed. Recollections of two World Wars roused France, (West) Germany, and other European states to initiate the European Coal and Steel Community in 1952 with the goal of improving relations between former belligerents. Article Five of the NATO was invoked, 52 years after the organization's establishment, in the aftermath of a terrorist attack on the United States. Similarly, the 2004 Tsunami spurred Australia, Japan, India, and the US to set up the Tsunami Core Group. The group's evolution into the Quad, however, is chiefly predicated on the rise of

11 Dhruva Jaishankar, "It's Time to Resuscitate the Asia-Pacific Quad," *Brookings Blog*, last modified January 9, 2017, accessed May 12, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/01/09/its-time-to-resuscitate-the-asia-pacific-quad/>.

12 Frederick Kliem, "Why Quasi Alliances Will Persist in the Indo-Pacific: The Fall and Rise of the Quad," *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 7, no. 3 (2020): 271-304.

13 Smruti Pattanaik, "Indian Ocean in the Emerging Geo-strategic Context: Examining India's Relations with its Maritime South Asian Neighbors," *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 12, no. 2 (2016): 126-142.

China and the emergence of non-traditional security threats in the region.¹⁴

As the Quad's inception has been comprehensively reviewed in scholarly work,¹⁵ our assessment will chiefly focus on why Australia withdrew from the security dialogue in 2008. This section discusses first image explanations,¹⁶ tying Australia's decision to Prime Minister Rudd's idiosyncrasies and perceptions of Australia, the Quad, and China. The next section outlines the justifications posited by the Prime Minister as to what motivated his decision and evaluates other international and structure-level variables which may have contributed towards Australia's withdrawal and the Quad 1.0's subsequent collapse.

Although the Quad appeared to be a partnership between "like-minded democratic states" focused on addressing common strategic concerns, such as managing the rise of China in the Asia-Pacific region, it foundered in 2008 as a result of Australia's withdrawal. Canberra's decision is largely ascribed in scholarly literature to the worldview of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. Some academics contend that Rudd "sank Quad 1.0" as he

14 Rory Medcalf, "Balancing Act: Making Sense of the Quad," *Australian Foreign Affairs*, no. 10 (2020): 30–48; "Commentary: US Dreams of Asian NATO," *China Daily*, last modified July 13, 2003, accessed May 2, 2021,

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2003-07/18/content_246008.htm; David Envall, "The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue: Towards an Indo-Pacific Order?" *RSIS Policy Report* (2019); John Calabrese, "Assuring a free and open Indo-Pacific – Rebalancing the US approach," *Asian Affairs* 51, no. 2 (2020): 307-327.

15 Aurelia Mulgan, "Breaking the Mould: Japan's Subtle Shift from Exclusive Bilateralism to Modest Minilateralism," *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 30, no. 1 (2008): 52-72; Yin Chengde, "New Posture of US' Asia-Pacific Strategy," *China International Studies* 10 (2008): 41-57.

16 The author adopts the first/second/third image classifications outlined by Waltz (1959). According to him, the first image consists of the perceptions and nature of human beings (in other words the domestic intervening variable of leader image falls into this category and first image is therefore used interchangeably with leader image in this article), the second image consists of the internal organization of states (in this sense, domestic intervening variables such as strategic culture, state-society relations and domestic institutions outlined in Neoclassical Realism fall into this category) and the third image involves the anarchic international system and international developments such as changes in power polarity which transpire on the international plane. For more, see Section 3 and Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

was overtly predisposed towards China.¹⁷ They flag Rudd's determination to "reverse a decision to sell Australian uranium to India" and his visit to Beijing ahead of Tokyo as emblematic of his inclination towards China.¹⁸

The optics of the Labor government's behavior was thrown into sharp relief when its foreign minister, Stephen Smith, "assured Beijing that Canberra would pull out of the Quad."¹⁹ Rudd was also chastised for a speech he delivered at the Peking University in 2008 where he pronounced Australia as "China's 'zhèngyǒu' or 'true friend'."²⁰

The Rudd Labor government insisted that Quad 1.0 was "unduly provocative to Beijing" and was vague on its short and long-term objectives.²¹ Devoid of clearly distinguished areas of cooperation, it was also believed to jeopardize Canberra's robust economic ties with China (see Figure 1). Sophie Eisentraut and Bart Gaens argue that Canberra's high export dependency with China may have also factored into Rudd's decision-making, heightening his apprehensions over Australia's vulnerability to a potential coercive economic response from Beijing.²²

17 Graeme Dobell, "The Quantity and Quality of Quad Questions," *ASPI Strategist*, last modified February 25, 2019, accessed April 13, 2021, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-quantity-and-quality-of-quad-questions/>; Nick Bisley, "Australia's American Alliance and the Networking of Forces in East Asia," *International Politics* 57 (2020): 208224.

18 Daniel Flitton, "Who Really Killed the Quad 1.0?," *Lowy Institute*, last modified June 2, 2020, accessed May 20, 2021, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/who-really-killed-quad-10>.

19 Indrani Bagchai, "Australia to Pull Out of 'Quad' that Excludes China," *Times of India*, last modified February 6, 2008, accessed May 17, 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Australia-to-pull-out-of-quad-that-excludes-China/articleshow/2760109.cms>.

20 Nicholas Thomas, "The Economics of Power Transitions: Australia between China and the United States," *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 95 (2015): 861.

21 Brendan Taylor, "Contested Concept: Unpacking Australia's Indo-Pacific Debate," *Asian Politics & Policy* 12, no. 1 (2020): 79.

22 Sophie Eisentraut and Bart Gaens, *The US-Japan-India-Australia Quadrilateral Security Dialogue*, 5.

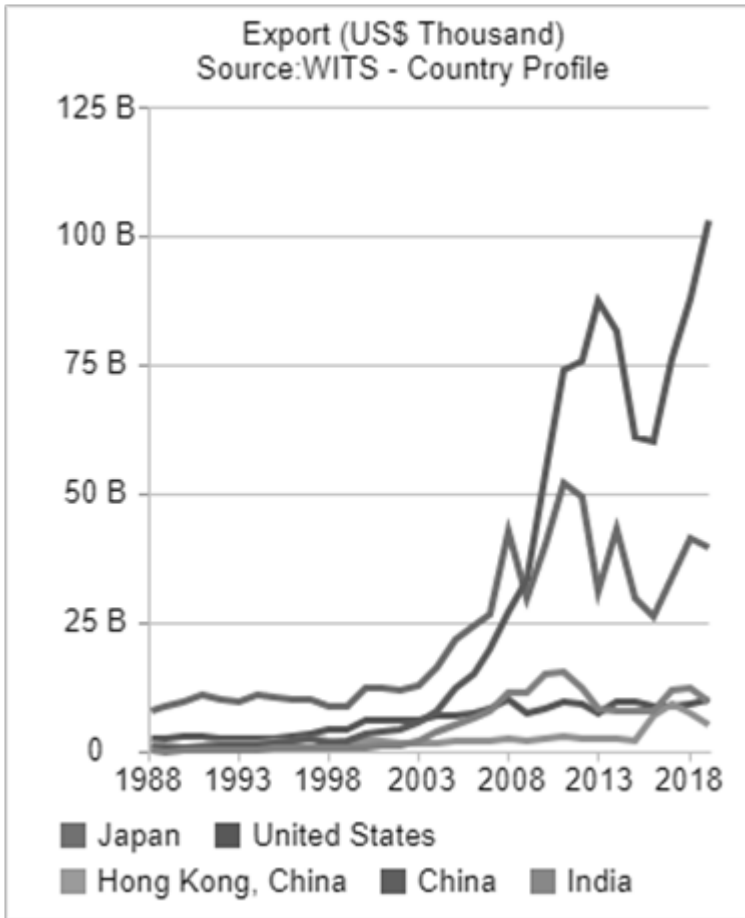


Figure 1. Australian Exports to Japan, US, China, and India from 1988-2019²³

China registered exponential growth following Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms in 1979. The three decades since 1979 showcased an average annual GDP growth rate of 9.8 percent, followed by a rate of 10.5

23 Fig 1. Australian Exports to Japan, US, China, and India from 1988-2019, Chart by World Integrated Trade Solution, “Australia Exports by country in US\$ Thousand 1988-2019,” from World Integrated Trade Solution, <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/AUS/StartYear/1988/EndYear/2019/TradeFlow/Export/Partner/BY-COUNTRY/Indicator/XPRT-TRD-VL#>.

percent between 2002 and 2007.²⁴ In order to alleviate apprehensions on its potential to upend the regional and international order, President Hu Jintao (2003–2013) introduced the concept of “peaceful rise” which countersigned Beijing’s intention to create a “harmonious world” without destabilizing the international order or seeking hegemony.²⁵ To quote the Chinese President, “the very purpose of China’s foreign policy is to maintain world peace and promote common development.”²⁶ Against this backdrop, an institutionalized framework to counter an overtly benign China may have appeared to be gratuitous to Rudd, prompting him to withdraw from the initiative during his tenure.

China’s vocal opposition against the Quad was another factor which may have influenced Rudd’s decision. Beijing described the initiative as an “Asian NATO” and declared that the Quad would destabilize regional security and intensify inter-state tensions.²⁷ The Chinese government also issued a *démarche* seeking an explanation from the Quad countries on the formation and purpose of the initiative.²⁸ *The Economist* concludes that Rudd, “discomfited

24 Yu Yongding and Naved Hamid, “China’s Economic Growth, Global Economic Crisis and China’s Policy Responses,” *The Pakistan Development Review* 47, no. 4 (2008): 338.

25 Hu Jintao, “Build Towards a Harmonious World of Lasting Peace and Common Prosperity – Statement by the President of the People’s Republic of China at the United Nations Summit New York,” last modified September 15, 2005, accessed September 22, 2021, <https://www.un.org/webcast/summit2005/statements15/china050915eng.pdf>; Bonnie Glaser and Evan Medeiros, “The Changing Ecology of Foreign Policy-Making in China: The Ascension and Demise of the Theory of ‘Peaceful Rise,’” *The China Quarterly*, no. 190 (2007): 291–310; Yu Xintian, “Harmonious World and China’s Road of Peaceful Development,” *China International Studies* 6 (2007): 11–29.

26 Hu Jintao, “China’s Development is an Opportunity for Asia,” speech delivered at the opening ceremony of the Bo’ao Forum for Asia 2004 annual conference, *China Daily*, last modified April 27, 2004, accessed September 22, 2021, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-04/17/content_356441.htm.

27 Mittika Sarkar, “China and Quad2.0: Between Response and Regional Construct,” *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India* 16, no. 1 (2020): 2; “US Dreams of Asian NATO,” *China Daily*, last modified July 13, 2003, accessed May 2, 2021, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2003-07/18/content_246008.htm.

28 Rahul Mishra, “An Indian Perspective,” *The ASAN Forum*, last modified July 2, 2018, accessed September 22, 2021, <https://theasanforum.org/an-indian-perspective/#a12>.

by China's prickly reaction," believed that it was not in Australia's interests to augment China's resentment and consequently withdrew from Quad 1.0.²⁹

Some claim that the Prime Minister was motivated by his desire to maintain a balanced relationship between the US and China. At the time, the United States was facing the brunt of the Global Financial Crisis while China emerged relatively unscathed from long-term negative economic ramifications.³⁰ Accordingly, an estrangement with the next potential global economic hegemon owing to a security alliance with Washington and its allies could have been perceived by Rudd as an impolitic decision.

Moreover, tensions had begun to flare up in the early 2000s between Washington and Beijing over the island of Taiwan. William Tow posits Rudd's apprehension over the possibility that Australia would have to intervene militarily to support the US, in the event a conflict erupted in the Taiwan Straits or East China Sea, as influencing him to abandon Quad 1.0 prematurely.³¹ Michael Cohen sums up the Labor government's position by stating that Rudd was "uneasy about tilting too closely to Washington and adopting too hard a line towards China."³²

This section illustrated first image explanations as to what may have motivated Rudd to exit Quad 1.0. The Prime Minister's predisposition towards China, his apprehensions of potential negative ramifications on the Sino-Australian bilateral trade relationship, his desire to avoid engendering resentment among Beijing's policymakers, and his aspiration to balance between the US and China have been advanced as justifications vindicating his decision. However, a few observers, including the former Prime Minister himself, voiced alternative explanations for Australia's withdrawal from Quad 1.0. These accounts move away from the unit-

29 The Economist, "An Indo-Pacific Club Builds Heft", *The Economist*, November 21, 2020, 60, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2020/11/19/an-indo-pacific-club-builds-heft>

30 Richard Iley and Mervyn Lewis, *Global Finance After the Crisis: The United States, China, and the New World Order* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013).

31 William Tow, "Asia's Competitive 'Strategic Geometrics': the Australian Perspective," *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 30, no. 1 (2008): 43.

32 Michael Cohen, "Political Parties, Australia and the US Alliance: 1976-2016," *Asian Security* 16, no. 3 (2020): 335.

level and instead, outline structural causes for the downfall of Quad 1.0.³³

2.2 Alternative Contributing Factors?

This section calls into question conventional wisdom on the Quad’s dissolution. Rudd argues that Quad 1.0 was a futile endeavor as “there was no clear consensus of what the Quadrilateral Strategic Dialogue” entailed.³⁴ Descriptors including “an alliance, an axis of democracy, a security diamond or a way to contain China” which were ascribed to Quad 1.0 may have contributed towards its early demise.³⁵ As a comprehensive outline of the initiative’s objectives was not laid out and because the initiative was portrayed by some media outlets as a Western-led approach to contain the rise of China, policymakers from Japan and India may have harbored a reticence to back the initiative.³⁶

Moreover, Rudd adds that Abe’s successor, Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda was lukewarm towards Quad 1.0.³⁷ Some observers concur with Rudd’s assessment. For example, Vinu Chotani describes Fukuda as a leader with a “pro-China tilt”³⁸ while Ram Madhav insists that the Prime Minister did not wish to jeopardize Japan’s robust economic ties with China.³⁹ An absence of enthusiasm towards Quad 1.0 and the belief that it was “unnecessarily provocative towards China”⁴⁰ may have contributed towards a shift in perception

33 For more on the three images, see footnote 16 and Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001): 16-41.

34 Rudd, “The Convenient Rewriting of the History of the ‘Quad.’”

35 Tanvi Madan, “The Rise, Fall and Rebirth of the ‘Quad,’” *War on the Rocks*, last modified November 16, 2017, accessed January 15, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/11/rise-fall-rebirth-quad/>.

36 Richard Leaver, “Issues in Australian Foreign Policy: January to June 2008,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 54, no. 4 (2008): 600.

37 Rudd, “The Convenient Rewriting of the History of the ‘Quad.’”

38 Vinu Chotani, “Leading from the Kantei: Japan and the Quad,” *Tokyo Review*, last modified October 5, 2020, accessed May 20, 2021, <https://www.tokyoreview.net/2020/10/leading-from-the-kantei-japan-and-the-quad/>.

39 Ram Madhav, “Quad Must Be Built on Agendas, Not Emotions. Can’t Afford to Become Another NATO,” *The Print*, last modified October 16, 2020, accessed May 20, 2021, <https://theprint.in/opinion/quad-must-be-built-on-agendas-not-emotions-cant-afford-to-become-nato/524749/>.

40 Tow, “Asia’s Competitive ‘Strategic Geometrics,’” 32.

of the Quad's expediency in Tokyo and Canberra, contributing to its "quiet death."⁴¹ Rudd claims that in light of these international developments, the blame for having dismantled the Quad should not be placed on his shoulders.

While structural factors, including Fukuda's reluctance to strengthen Quad 1.0 and the absence of a cohesive strategy may have hampered the Quad's development, it does not appear to be the proximate causal factor which led to Quad 1.0's collapse. Although Fukuda displayed some degree of hesitation, the lack of enthusiasm of one secondary-level constituent member (assuming that the United States, owing to its capabilities and global reach, is a primary level constituent) may not have substantially persuaded other member states to alter their perception of the Quad. Moreover, the argument that the Quad is nebulous in character insufficiently explains why a member-state would withdraw from an initiative that is comprised of long-standing allies and is geared towards tackling non-traditional and traditional security threats.

Furthermore, since an organization's focus develops over time as a result of exogenous and endogenous variables, it is a *non sequiter* to conclude that Rudd's decision to withdraw from the Quad was solely on the basis that it was vague in its short-and long-term objectives. Consequently, this article, while acknowledging the structure-level justifications offered by Rudd and others, positions the perception of the mini-lateral as the principal causal factor influencing Rudd's decision to withdraw. By applying this process tracing method, we arrive at a more lucid unfolding of why Australia withdrew from the initiative in 2008.

Structural theories such as Neoliberal Institutionalism and Neorealism discount first image descriptions as a casual explanation for changes in state behavior. Both theories take the state as the unit of analysis and conjecture that states withdraw from institutions owing to issues related to misinformation and relative gains respectively. However, as we have discussed above, discounting first and second image explanations generates the following puzzle: why was Australia the only state that withdrew from Quad 1.0? Why was India, with its traditional disinclination to deviate from nonaligned foreign policy, not the first state to withdraw?

Constructivism, as argued by Alexander Wendt, contends that

41 William Tow, "Minilateral Security's Relevance to US Strategy in the Indo-Pacific: Challenges and Prospects," *The Pacific Review* 32, no. 2 (2018): 241.

interaction between states, even within institutional settings, shapes their identities which consequently molds their interests. In the case of the Quad, this would imply that Australia's participation and enhanced interaction with other members within the institution would lead to an alignment in regional aspirations and further the necessity of enhancing ties *through* the institutionalized process to maintain regional stability. However, as discussed above, this was not the case.

Therefore, theories that disregard unit level variables⁴² cannot corroborate what transpired in 2008. Neoclassical Realism, on the other hand, utilizes unit and structure level explanations to deduce the reasons states alter their foreign policies, often in contravention of the optimal option. Before proceeding to the next section, which analyzes Australia's perception of Quad 1.0 using the Neoclassical Realist framework, a caveat is in order. Although Norrin Ripsman, Jeffrey Taliaferro, and Steven Lobell delineate three distinct types of Neoclassical Realist approaches, this article adopts the Type I variant of Neoclassical Realism.⁴³

3. Neoclassical Realism and Australian Foreign Policy

Neoclassical Realism is a theoretical perspective which is employed to explain the foreign policy of states. It combines the Neorealist emphasis on systemic pressures and stimuli with the *innenpolitik* of Classical Realism to account for a state's foreign policy. Neoclassical Realists contend that "systemic pressures" are "translated through intervening variables at the unit level" when a state adopts a foreign policy posture.⁴⁴

Neoclassical Realism also helps explain why "often against the perceived underlying structural incentives, states ended up pursuing a particular foreign policy."⁴⁵ According to Randall Schweller, "complex domestic political processes act as transmission belts that channel, mediate,

42 Unit level variables include the 'first image' and 'second image' as outlined by Waltz (1959).

43 Norrin Ripsman, Jeffrey Taliaferro, and Steven Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

44 Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (1998): 146.

45 Nicholas Smith, "Can Neoclassical Realism Become a Genuine Theory of International Relations?," *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 2 (2018): 743.

and (re)direct policy outputs in response to external forces.”⁴⁶ In contrast to Neorealist analysis which overlooks unit level intervening variables, Neoclassical Realists, while underscoring the salience of international power polarity and anarchy, argue that domestic unit-level variables are causally important when explaining the foreign policy of states. In other words, “systemic variables have causal primacy,” but domestic-level intervening variables ultimately shape and mold the state’s foreign policy.⁴⁷

Scholarly work on Neoclassical Realism has distilled four domestic intervening variables which tend to influence a state’s foreign policy. They include leader images, strategic culture, domestic institutions, and state-society relations. Each of these (unit-level) domestic intervening variables influences different stages of a state’s policy making process.

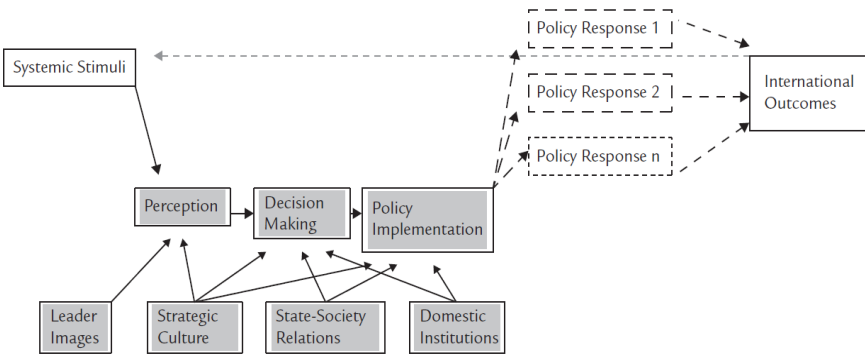


Figure 2. Neoclassical Realist Model⁴⁸

46 Randall Schweller, “Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing,” *International Security* 29, no. 2 (2006): 164.

47 Jeffrey Taliaferro, “State Building for Future Wars: Neoclassical Realism,” *Security Studies* 15, no. 3 (2006): 466.

48 Ripsman et al., *Neoclassical Realist Theory*, 34

Although, at the time, China had not adopted aggressive measures in the South China and East China seas or initiated the Belt and Road Initiative, it had begun military modernization at a rapid pace.⁴⁹ Moreover, scholarly debate on China in the 1990s to early 2000s revolved around several antithetical positions. Some argued that China's behavior manifested early signs of a revisionist great power.⁵⁰ Others interpreted Beijing as a status-quo power that did not pose a threat to the regional security architecture, as a conservative power that did not exhibit any intent to contest the US-led international order, or as a state bandwagoning with the United States.⁵¹ In retrospect, it can be posited that China's behavior in the early 2000s may have not acted as a strong coagulant to bind the four members within the Quad framework. Consequently, the conviction in some capitals that Beijing would not pose an immediate or medium-term threat may have weakened the resolve of Quad members to position the initiative as a measure to contain the rise of China.

Nevertheless, while the structural stimuli (the potential threat of China) may not have contributed towards the Quad's development along the lines of stronger security bonds, it cannot account for the dissolution of the initiative. Quad members also "took pains to characterize their cooperation as directed towards collectively providing public goods rather than aimed at any particular country."⁵² Consequently, the Quad's potential in tackling traditional and non-traditional security challenges—similar to the Tsunami Core Group (2004-2005)—underscores the benefits it could have generated had Australia not left the initiative.

Domestic intervening variables such as public opinion and parliamentary opposition, in addition to structural variables as depicted in

49 William Callahan, "How to Understand China: The Dangers and Opportunities of Being a Rising Power," *Review of International Studies* 31, no. 4 (2005): 705.

50 Richard Bernstein and Ross Munro, "The Coming Conflict with America," *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 2 (1992): 19; Bill Gertz, *The China Threat: How the People's Republic Targets America* (Washington D.C.: Regnery, 2000): 199; John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001).

51 Zheng Bijian, "China's Peaceful Rise to Great-Power Status," *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 5 (2005): 18-24; Robert Ross, "Beijing as a Conservative Power," *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 2 (1997): 33-44; William Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security* 24, no. 1 (1999): 5-41.

52 Lavina Lee, "Abe's Democratic Security Diamond and New Quadrilateral Initiative: An Australian Perspective," *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* 30, no. 2 (2016): 7.

Figure 2, tend to play a significant role in a country's foreign policy. In the case of Australia's withdrawal from the Quad however, this does not hold true. Australian public opinion polls conducted in 2008 reflected a decline in trust of China. A 2008 *Lowy Institute* poll for instance, concluded that China was the least trusted great power while the United States shared the most trusted great power status alongside Japan.⁵³ The number of Australian respondents identifying China as a threat also jumped from 25 percent in 2006 to 34 percent in 2008.⁵⁴ Public opinion therefore appeared to be conducive towards Australia's continued participation within the Quad.

Likewise, Parliamentary opposition (domestic institutions) did not play a part in the decision. Members from the Liberal Party strongly opposed the possibility of retreating from the Quad. For instance, Andrew Robb, representing the Liberal Party, asserted that "the quadrilateral dialogue of democracies was clearly abandoned to appease China."⁵⁵ Nor did members of the Labor Party appear to influence Rudd's decision to leave Quad 1.0. Instead, members of the Labor Party sought to justify the outcome based on the tepid behavior of Japan and India (structural variables) as well as the potential negative ramifications on Australia's economy.⁵⁶ However, what needs to be remembered is that these justifications were first voiced by Rudd himself and merely echoed by members of his political party. Consequently, one finds it difficult to contend that public opinion or Australia's domestic institutions (the Parliamentary opposition or the Labor Party) played a significant role in Australia's perception of Quad 1.0.

The literature reviewed above (sections 2.1 and 2.2) demonstrates that Australia's decision to withdraw from Quad 1.0 was not primarily motivated by structural dictates, nor was it influenced by public opinion (state-society relations) or domestic institutions. Consequently, the next

53 Fergus Hanson, *Australia and the World: Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (Canberra: Lowy Institute, 2008): 7.

54 *Ibid.*, 10.

55 Commonwealth of Australia House of Representatives, *House of Representatives Official Hansard*, no. 7 2008, 4463, last modified June 4, 2008, accessed July 4, 2021, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/chamber/hansardr/2008-06-04/toc_pdf/5895-12.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22chamber/hansardr/2008-06-04/0102%22.

56 *Ibid.*, 4464-4468.

section employs the “leader image” and “strategic culture” intervening variables, as denoted in *Figure 2*, to examine whether Australia’s departure from Quad 1.0 was a result of a change in Canberra’s “perception” caused by either/both of the two domestic intervening variables.

3.1 Strategic Culture and Leader Images

Which factors account for Australia’s change in perception under the Rudd administration? Was Australia’s decision to leave the Quad impelled by its strategic culture? Or instead, should “leader image” be held accountable? This section begins by outlining Australia’s unique strategic culture and the degree of influence this may have had on the Labor government’s decision. It then discusses the “leader image” of Prime Minister Rudd and examines whether it explains why Australia withdrew from Quad 1.0.

Strategic culture, according to Neoclassical Realists, “can influence the way the state perceives and adapts to systemic stimuli and structural shifts in material capability” as it often takes root among elites and the general public.⁵⁷ A country’s strategic culture is contingent on its “history, geography and identity.”⁵⁸ Australia’s strategic culture is fostered by its identity as an Anglo-Saxon outpost in an Asian spatial context. This engenders a sense of vulnerability among Australian policymakers and the public. Australia’s strategic culture is also reflected by its tendency to align with Western great powers (the United Kingdom till the 1940s and the US since then) to protect its territory from hostile external actors.⁵⁹

Prime Minister Howard’s decision to join Quad 1.0 was influenced by the perception that an alignment with the United States and other democratic states would enhance Australia’s defensive position. In that sense, his decision to align with a Western nation (the US) and other Asian nations which ascribe to common democratic values (India and Japan) aligns with a strategic culture

57 Ripsman et al., *Neoclassical Realist Theory*, 66.

58 Michael O’Keefe, “Teaching Australian Foreign Policy through the Lens of Strategic Culture,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 73, no. 6 (2019): 532-538.

59 Alex Burns and Ben Eltham, “Australia’s Strategic Culture: Constraints and Opportunities in Security Policymaking,” *Contemporary Security Policy* 35, no. 2 (2014): 187-210.

explanation. Furthermore, Australia's concern of China's power projection capabilities and its robust economic engagement with several Pacific Island states exacerbated Australia's apprehension and sense of insecurity.⁶⁰ Thus, strategic culture helps explain why Australia was inclined to join Quad 1.0.

However, Prime Minister Rudd's decision to pull out of the initiative, particularly one with defensive overtones, does not validate the strategic culture explanation of Australia's enduring sense of vulnerability. Nor does strategic culture explain why Australia withdrew from an initiative that included a close defense ally such as the US. Consequently, it can be argued that strategic culture does not explain why Australia withdrew from Quad 1.0 in 2008.

According to Taliaferro, leaders pursue foreign and security policies "based on their assessments and calculations of relative power and other states' intentions."⁶¹ Section 2.1 illustrated the diverse perspectives postulated by scholars as to what may have motivated Rudd to exit Quad 1.0. They outlined Rudd's worldview (leader image) as having been influenced by a) his bias towards China, b) his anxiety of upending Sino-Australian economic ties, c) his desire to prevent Chinese antipathy against Canberra, d) and his aspiration to balance ties with the United States and China. The Prime Minister's risk aversion and the factors outlined above colored his worldview of the geopolitical and geo-economic struggle between Washington and Beijing. It also prompted Rudd to perceive the Quad as yielding more costs than benefits, stretching his "political comfort level to snapping point."⁶² As a result, evidence points to Rudd's "leader image" as having been the most significant determinant influencing Australia's perception of Quad 1.0 and its decision to leave the initiative. The next section assesses whether the revived Quad (2.0) will be able to sustain its momentum or instead encounter similar problems to those of Quad 1.0.

60 Denghua Zhang and Stephanie Lawson, "China in Pacific Regional Politics," *The Round Table* 106, no. 2 (2017): 197-206.

61 Jeffrey Taliaferro, "State Building for Future Wars: Neoclassical Realism," 486.

62 Euan Graham, "The Quad Deserves Its Second Chance," in *Debating the Quad*, ed. Andrew Carr (Canberra: Australian National University, 2018), 4-7.

4. Has the Ship Sailed for Quad 2.0 or was Quad 1.0 just ahead of its time?

China's Belt and Road Initiative spurred the United States and several Asian allies to develop an Indo-Pacific strategy. In conjunction with this strategy, the United States and its Asian allies also revived the Quad "security platform in opposition to China's expansionism."⁶³ Both initiatives appear to be driven by the apprehension that China "wants to change the international order to suit its expanding interests, and lay claim to territory over which others are willing to fight."⁶⁴ The Quad (2.0), relaunched in 2017, was backed by the active participation of Australia, India, Japan and the United States. Policy documents from Tokyo, Washington, Canberra, and New Delhi also referenced the salience and synergy of the Indo-Pacific Strategy and the Quad.⁶⁵

China's assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region since the early 2010s acted as a stimulant, channelling the centrifugal perspectives of the four members towards a more centripetal position. "Australia's concerns over China's strategic posture in the Indo-Pacific have been reinforced by revelations of interference by Beijing in Australian domestic affairs."⁶⁶ Chinese restrictions on beef, barley, and wine exports from Australia, and Xi's efforts to deter Chinese students from studying at Australian universities exacerbated bilateral tensions. Similarly, India adopted a stronger stance against Beijing following the latter's incursions into contested territory along the Indo-China border. Repeated clashes between their armed forces have therefore, reinvigorated New Delhi's threat perception of Beijing's hostile intentions. Commodore Ashok Rai of the Indian Navy sums up the necessity for a stronger military stance stating that "there is no denying that China is

63 Sung Jung, Jaehyon Lee, and Ji-Yong Lee, "The Indo-Pacific Strategy and US Alliance Network Expandability: Asian Middle Powers' Positions on Sino-US," *Journal of Contemporary China* 30, no. 127 (2021): 53.

64 Rory Medcalf, *Contest for the Indo-Pacific: Why China Won't Map the Future* (Melbourne: La Trobe University Press, 2020).

65 Zhang Jie, "The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and Reconstruction of Asia-Pacific Order," *China International Studies*, no. 74 (2019): 55-73.

66 Andrew O'Neil and Lucy West, "The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and Indo-Pacific Minilateralism: Resurrection Without Renewal?," in *Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific: The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism, and ASEAN*, eds. Bhubhindar Singh and Sarah Teo, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020): 27-41.

exhibiting signs of being an assertive—if not aggressive—revisionist power.”⁶⁷ In East Asia, Japan was witness to the “vastly increased ‘gray-zone’ coercive behavior by China’s Coast Guard and maritime militia vessels” following the nationalization of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands.⁶⁸ In response, the Quad was reinstated as part of a wider conversation over how to manage China’s rise. In an attempt to signal the rising congruence between the Quad members, President Biden also hosted the first Quad Leaders’ Summit in March 2021.

Although on the structural-level, China’s behavior appears more threatening than in the early 2000s, and on the unit-level, meetings at senior official and head of state level have been uninterrupted since 2017, it remains to be seen whether Quad 2.0 can deliver on its objectives. In particular, dissimilar conceptualizations of the Indo-Pacific region’s geographical space coupled with a reluctance to jeopardize trade ties with China may hinder deeper security engagement within Quad 2.0.

Moreover, despite efforts to expand Quad 2.0 to Quad Plus, it remains to be seen whether other Indo-Pacific countries would be inclined to jeopardize their vibrant economic ties with their indispensable regional partner—China—to engage with Quad 2.0. In case they do not, will the inability to increase Quad partners/allies derail the momentum of the initiative? Disagreements among the Quad members escalating to the level of a breakdown of cooperation is also conceivable. For example, US Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs), which were hitherto chiefly directed at China, were conducted in April 2021 in the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone without informing New Delhi. The move resulted in a public outcry from Indian policymakers and was criticized as a US attempt to lump India into the same basket as China.⁶⁹ The delay in the provision of medical assistance to India following a surge of COVID-19 deaths, despite having pledged—during Quad virtual meetings—to coordinate the provision of vaccines and medical assistance,

67 Ashok Rai, “Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad 2.0): A Credible Strategic Construct or Mere ‘Foam in the Ocean’?,” *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India* 14, no. 2 (2018): 145.

68 Patrick Buchan and Benjamin Rimland, *Defining the Diamond: The Past, Present, and Future of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue* (Washington D.C.: CSIS, 2020): 4.

69 Rahul Singh and Rezaul Laskar, “Concern in Delhi as US warship Transits its Economic Zone,” *Live Mint*, last modified April 9, 2021, accessed May 25, 2021, <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/concern-in-delhi-as-us-warship-transits-its-economic-zone-11617992295963.html>.

also reflects negatively on the ability of the Quad to effectively tackle non-traditional security challenges even in the territory of one of its members.⁷⁰

5. Conclusion

This paper examines why Australia withdrew from the Quad (1.0) in 2008, only a year after joining the initiative. It utilizes Neorealist, Neoliberal Institutionalist, Constructivist and Neoclassical Realist lenses to assess whether domestic and/or structural factors played a significant role in Australia's decision. Neorealism and Neoliberal Institutionalism, with their emphasis on structural variables, fail to accurately explain why Australia withdrew from the Quad. Structural factors such as the threat posed from China in the early 2000s (even though Australia's threat perception was not as high as it is at present) coupled with the growing incidences of non-traditional security threats incentivized Australia to remain within the Quad. Similarly, interactions between Australia and other Quad members—through a common institutional platform—enhanced existing ties, especially given the commonality of threats each member encountered in the region. Be that as it may, Australia withdrew from the Quad a year after it was formed. As a consequence of Australia's withdrawal, the Quad institutional framework ceased to exist until it was revitalized in 2017.

If structural factors do not account for Australia's decision, what motivated the sudden reversal? In order to identify the proximate causal factor contributing to Australia's decision, this paper scrutinized how each of the four domestic intervening variables (i.e., leader images, strategic culture, domestic institutions, and state-society relations) may have had an effect on Australia's decision. By doing so the paper concludes that Rudd's "leader image" played the most significant part in Australia's decision to leave the Quad in 2008.

The final section of this paper appraised the inception of the reinvigorated Quad (2.0) and briefly assessed whether it also suffers from the problems which impeded the progress of Quad 1.0. It concluded that Quad 2.0 may have greater staying power in contrast to Quad 1.0 owing to a changed strategic setting, characterized by increasingly ambitious Chinese behavior. Nevertheless, prevailing points of contention, particularly at the domestic

70 Derek Grossman, "India's Brittle Confidence in America," *The Rand Blog*, last modified May 21, 2021, accessed June 6, 2021, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2021/05/indias-brittle-confidence-in-america.html>.

level, must be addressed if the Quad (2.0) intends to play a robust role in the Indo-Pacific. Hence, the article concludes that the primary determinants propelling the initiative (Quad 2.0) forward is the escalating incidence of China's bellicose international behavior as well as the political unity between the Quad members. However, if domestic intervening variables play a major role in influencing the foreign policies of the Quad nations to move away from the initiative, we may see a recurrence of the Quad's demise in the near future.