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**HOW THE QUADRILATERAL SECURITY DIALOGUE SHOULD
DEVELOP IN THE CONTEXT OF CHINA’S AMBITIONS IN THE
EAST CHINA SEA**

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Abstract

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quad has been established in 2008 and has been reorganized starting with 2017. With rising tensions in the East China Sea due to president Xi’s ambitions against Taiwan and with global security challenges following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine the Quad’s evolution has become interesting in the given context. The AUKUS partnership leads to question of whether other strategic security partnerships will be developed in the Quad and whether the countries building this alliance can have a common voice in regards of political and security issues in the region. Could the Quad be structured similar to NATO is a major question that this paper tries to answer.

Key words: security dialogue, capability development, strategic framework, indo-pacific alliance

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to analyze the security context in the Eastern China Sea by understanding what international organizations have been developed in order to increase collaboration in the region. The desire is to observe beyond the development of security and defense alliance but also to see if there are economic alliances that could enhance the collaboration of different states in the Indo-Pacific area. It is our belief that the biggest and most important such alliance is that of The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD) also known as the Quad. This partnership is actually a strategic informal forum that is being developed between four countries, the United States of America, Australia, India and Japan. The potential for this forum to expand to an alliance with economic and security implications is what makes this analysis a useful one.

The need for collaboration between several countries in the Indo-Pacific has been an increased need due to China’s actions in the East China Sea [3]. For more than 70 years China has considered that Taiwan, an island with a population of more than 23 million population represents a province that it has failed to reunify with following the Chinese civilian war that brought to power the Communist regime to China. At the end of that particular war, in 1949, the opposition retreated to the island of Taiwan. For this reason China is opposed to any initiative that would permit Taiwanese authorities to have international legitimacy. Military exercises are often conducted close to Taiwanese territorial waters by Chinese armed forces in order to demonstrate the supremacy of China disputed area around the China East Sea. The United States has been a constant supporter of Taiwan, trying to enhance dialogue with this country as well as trying to develop alliance around the



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East China Sea that would increase a democratic presence in the area and would allow for security policies to be developed in front of the China's potential aggressions. The example of the Ukrainian war and the aggression started by Russia in the Eastern part of Europe is a demonstration of the fundamental need of international alliance that can deter autocracies with expansionist goals. While NATO and the European Union exist and maintain a high security level for the transatlantic collaboration such alliances and international partnership are insignificant in the Indo Pacific region.

The vision for a development of a democratic dialog in the Pacific belong to the vision of Japan's prime minister Shinzo Abe who understood the need for such a collaboration from the early 2000's and helped initiate the forum in 2007. The dialog evolved with a defense output in developing military common exercises for the four nations. Such an exercise implies the naval forces of each country and is named the *Exercise Malabar*. China has protested against all of these exercises and Australia withdrew for a period of time from the Dialogue after the heavily contested common exercise between the Quad and Singapore that brought a lot of backlash from China officials. On the other hand political entities in India and Japan in the past 15 years have changed hand several times with some of these government bodies desiring better political and commercial relations with China and therefore diminishing their role in the forum. The one country that has kept pushing for increased collaboration in the Pacific has been the US and their objectives have been meet with a tightened and stronger military collaboration with Australia. The Quad's overall objectives had been developed and implemented into other organizations in the region. It is the aim of this paper to analyze the role that the Quad has had when taking into consideration the already existing international institutions in the Indo Pacific with whom the forum has interacted. Such an example is the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), an organization that in 2017 held a Summit where the Quad agreed to continue its military exercises in the region.

The Quad was designed from its very inception with the purpose of becoming an Asian platform for democracy, with the aim of attracting not just the original four member states into the dialogue but also expanding to other central Asian countries, the Korean peninsula as well as countries from the South-East Asia.

In the following chapters we are going to analyze how Indo Pacific countries including the four from the Quad have managed to interact and collaborate on several fields.

2. Economic Interrelations in the East China Sea

While the Quad has been mostly an initiative that has taken the shape of a dialogue format with an output in common military exercises, the United States has sought to further develop the collaboration between Indo Pacific countries in other fields, especially in the economic domain. It is for this reason that in 2022 The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity was created with the aim of fast and rapid economic growth for the member states. 14 countries joined the initiative upon its development including: Australia, Brunei, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and of course the United States.

The four major areas of economic collaboration are in trade including digital economy, supply chains, green energy and fighting corruption.

In terms of economic collaborations in the area another organization that needs to be taken into consideration is the already mentioned ASEAN. Like the European Union, ASEAN has also developed a political dimension, compared to its initial economic dimension when it was first created in 1967. Since then ASEAN has expanded to 10 countries including: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Like the QUAD, because of one of its initial purposes, of containing communism in the area, ASEAN has been viewed as an equivalent to NATO in the Indo Pacific.



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In terms to their relevance for the QUAD, the importance of the ASEAN and the Indo Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity is in that they create a foundation, a network for economic collaboration, partnerships and integration for several democracies in the East China Sea that could collaborate in other areas, beyond that of economic policies.

It is for this reason that in the following chapter we aim to analyze the existing and potential security collaboration initiatives in the area and why they are of need.

3. Security Interrelations in the East China Sea

China’s policies of aggression in the East China Sea was what lead many countries in the area to seek for means of deterrence and collaboration in terms of security. From all of China’s territorial claims in the area, the most visible is that concerning Taiwan, as it can be seen in **Figure 1**.

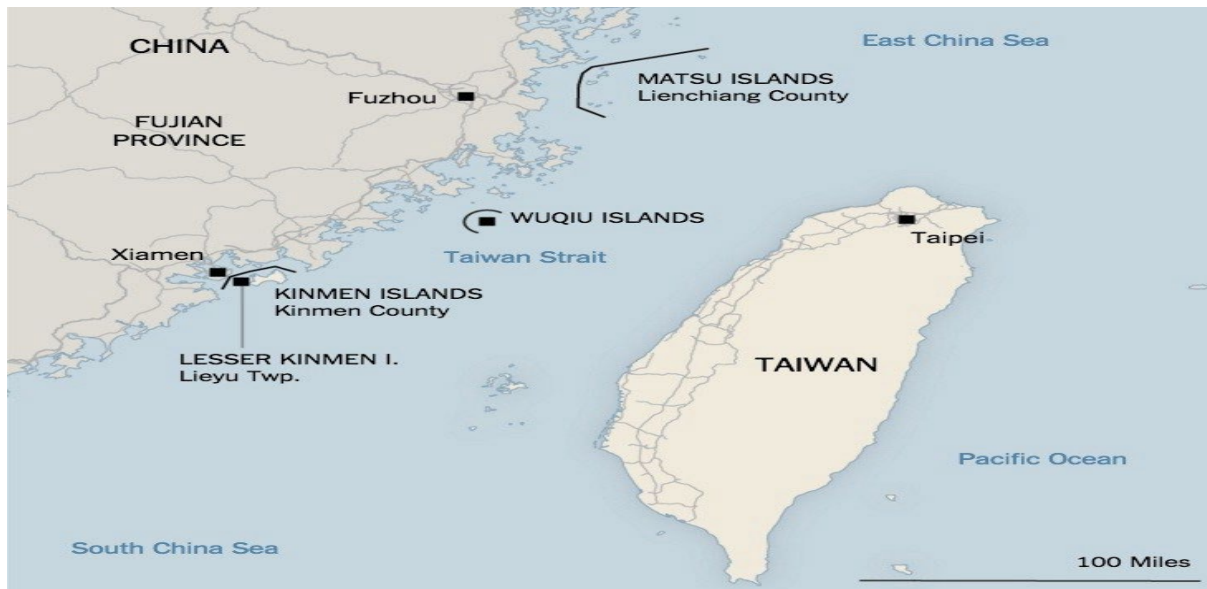


Fig. 1 South China Sea, China’s territorial claims around Taiwanese islands

The Kinmen Island and the Matsu Islands right on the Coast of China represent one of China’s most ambitious territorial claims as these island belong currently to the Republic of China body that is governing Taiwan. China has several other claims in the East China Sea, from the Paracel Islands to the Scarborough Shoal to the Spratly Islands [7].

The need for deterrence in the region was therefore clear and a first military capacity that would answer rising threats in the East China Sea has been the creation of AUKUS in 2021, a trilateral military alliance comprising the United States, United Kingdom and Australia. According to these agreement Australia would be helped by the two other partners in developing nuclear submarines with the purpose of strengthening western military presence around the Pacific. China considered that this capacity would be a threat to its own goals and ambitions in the region. Such a capacity is an example of collaboration within the Quad that could enhance overall military, security and defense presence for democratic forces in the region.

Like the United Kingdom other European countries, NATO member states can have a role in the region. Such is the example of France.

When talking about France’s role in the in Indo-Pacific we must assess the fact that the French government sees itself as an “island state” in the region because of its many territories in the area including: La Reunion, New Caledonia, French Polynesia or Mayotte. These territories are home to French citizens and they provide France an enormous exclusive economic zone of more



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than 11 million square kilometers. Because of its overseas territories France shares border with 12 states in the Pacific Ocean and 5 states in the Indian Ocean. It must be said that France has the necessary military capacity and geographical advantage of becoming a player in the region if it considers that it should [6].

With several NATO member states being able to take a role in the Pacific a question has to be addressed of whether the entire NATO organization is willing to be involved in the Indo Pacific. The best answer to this question comes from the most recent NATO Strategic Concept. This document has been developed following the NATO Summit in Madrid in 2022, a Summit that has forever changed NATO's perspective on the world following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. NATO has since started to assess other autocracies around the world as potential sources of risks and threats for the alliance [4]. China like Russia represents such a source. Therefore the NATO Strategic Concept has a take on the Indo Pacific, remotely to the organizations' efforts to understand the future global strategic and military environment. A document was created as an output on this take entitled: Strategic Foresight Regional Perspectives Report on the Indo Pacific. The analysis conducted by experts from NATO nations, NATO entities, academia and think tanks has concluded that China represents more than just a challenge in the region. China as a dominant de facto leader in the area will attempt to influence or constrain countries from the Indo Pacific through different means ranging from diplomatic, economic, cultural or even military. These attempts are to have a negative impact on democratic values, the rule of law, sovereignty and territorial integrity, or even international order at a higher level [1].

This assessment of NATO on the Indo Pacific is an unprecedented one, and therefore the questions that needs to be asked by the end of this analysis is whether we might find ourselves evolving towards an Asian NATO in the region. During the Trump administration an idea was launched that the Quad can represent the foundation for an Asian NATO. However several specialists have called the quad a much more modern alliance, one built around common security and geopolitical objectives, an organization with much more flexibility than NATO. That is however not China's view that considers that indeed in the near future the Quad will evolve to a structure similar to that of NATO[2].

4. Conclusions

Seeing how the NATO alliance has managed to help Ukraine in dealing with the Russian invasion would enable specialists to consider that maybe the evolution of the Quad into a similar structure to that of NATO would not be a bad thing, on the contrary it would allow democracies around the East China Sea to better defend themselves in case of China aggressions. The risk that autocracies like Russia and China represent have become clear during 2022. Japan is ready to increase its defense budget to 2% as it is the only country in the world that borders Russia, China and North Korea. South Korea aims to increase its own capabilities for defense, while New Zealand and Australia aim to become even more interoperable with UK and US forces. For Taiwan the development of even more defense capabilities remains the only option [5].

However to consider that NATO's assessment on the Indo Pacific represents a full alignment of the alliance in a similar approach to China as it has had on Russia is an unrealistic stretch. Each country in the Quad as well as all NATO countries have different commercial and political partnerships with China (Japan, India, Germany, and France, just to name a few). Because of these relations not all countries see China the same when viewing it as a challenge in terms of security, economic and politics. The US will continue to push for a better understanding of the Indo Pacific region as an area where there are actors that could manifest as Russia has on the European Eastern Flank. It will depend on the United States own abilities to persuade more countries to join around its proposals.



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In the end the development of the Quad, the increasing economic alliances between democracies in the East China Sea as well as NATO's unprecedented inclusion of the Indo-Pacific in its Strategic Concept will allow the creation and development of further formats and partnerships between the United States, the European Union and Asian democracies willing to deter any potential security threats in the region. The landscape on that matter has changed forever and it is up to states and international bodies to just determine the speed on each these means of collaborations will develop.

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