

The Quad: How this new partnership can preserve peace for Japan and strengthen democracy in our region

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30th Prime Minister of Australia, 2018-2022

The assassination of the late Prime Minister Abe Shinzo was a truly devastating loss.

Shinzo's humility and grace combined with his strength and insight to chart a clear course for those who believe in a world order that favours freedom, in a sea of great disruption and uncertainty.

His vision of a 'free and open Indo-Pacific' has been embraced by like minded nations and provides the clear marker for bilateral, regional and global efforts.

His innate grasp of politics, economics and security issues enabled him to web together a coherent and integrated agenda, that pushed forward what Michael Green referred to in his latest work, as Japan's 'Line of Advantage'.

But I would argue he did more than this, pushing forward the line of advantage for liberal market based democracies and economies more broadly in our region.

The strong alignment of Australia and Japan's interest ensured that we have walked a very similar path.

It is therefore not surprising that we were both keen initiators and advocates for the elevation of the Quad to a leader level dialogue. I want to especially acknowledge the great contribution of Prime Ministers Abe, Suga and most recently Kishida to this end.

Australia, India, Japan and the United States are not the only liberal democracies in our region. Nor are we the only liberal democracies who have significant interests in our region. And we do not always have the same lens on our region.

However we do share in the vision of sovereign independent nations being able to engage, free of coercion and hegemonic influences, to transparently pursue their legitimate state interests, consistent with the international rules based order, to improve the quality of life for all our peoples.

By sharing our unique perspectives on the region, consistent with our shared values, we gain a greater understanding of the broader picture and the responses we can make usefully together and individually.

This was my experience of the Quad as a founding member of the Leaders dialogue, joining President Biden, Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Suga.

And it is an initiative, combined with AUKUS, that has had the most profound impact on the strategic balance within the Indo-Pacific since the PRC started turning atolls into airports in the South China Sea.

Over the last decade the PRC has increasingly attempted to reshape our region, and the world, in a way more conducive to autocracies than liberal democracies.

As Prime Minister I referred to China, with Russia, as a new arc of autocracy of which the world must be wary.

This was recognised by NATO at their recent Summit declaring China a security challenge, calling out their assertive behavior as presenting ‘systemic challenges to the rules-based international order and to areas relevant to alliance security.’

Secretary General Stoltenberg stated “China was substantially building up its military forces, including nuclear weapons, bullying its neighbours, threatening Taiwan ... monitoring and controlling its own citizens through advanced technology, and spreading Russian lies and disinformation’.

This is not in Australia’s interests, nor any other nation in the Indo-Pacific that values its sovereignty.

It was Alexander Hamilton who rightly said “the nation which can prefer disgrace to danger is prepared for a master and deserves one.”

I was pleased to be part of and lead a Government in Australia that took a strong stand in response to the PRC’s assertiveness.

At one point the PRC’s frustrations with Australia were laid bare in a statement issued to an Australian journalist by their Embassy in Canberra.

The ‘fourteen points’ of the PRC’s grievances with Australia, can be summarised as follows;

1. Applying Australian foreign investment laws to disallow PRC sourced investment in critical Australian assets and infrastructure
2. Taking lawful decisions to prevent Huawei Technologies and ZTE from participating in the build of Australia’s 5G network on security grounds
3. Passing laws that protected Australia from foreign interference in our domestic institutions, such as universities, and political affairs
4. Exercising control over the conduct of research and scientific partnerships on projects sensitive to Australia’s national security interests
5. Calling for an independent inquiry into the origins of COVID-19
6. Providing national statements to the UN on Xinjian, Hong Kong and Taiwan
7. Proving national statements on the application of UNCLOS in the South China Sea
8. Supporting statements of our allies on issues relating to PRC
9. Preventing sub-national Governments from entering into agreements with other nations that are inconsistent with national foreign policy settings

10. Funding well respected national foreign policy think tanks that had been critical of the PRC
11. Using search and seizure powers to enforce our foreign interference and espionage laws,
12. Calling out cyber attacks from highly sophisticated state based actors
13. Permitting freedom of speech by Members of Parliament on issues relating to the PRC
14. Allowing a free media in Australia to independently report on issues relating to the PRC.

No self respecting liberal democracy would concede any of these points to any other national Government, especially the PRC. A point I made to the G7+ dialogue in June last year, which also included Korea, India and South Africa, to awake other like minded to the reality of the grey zone tactics and front line that countries like Australia, Japan and India were now on.

We chose to resist, not provoke the PRC.

We have always recognised the economic achievements of the PRC and indeed played a significant role in the PRC's economic success, especially through our resources sector.

However the tone of PRC engagement during the past five to seven years within our region has changed. Of course nations will wish to engage with the PRC. As many note, the PRC is not going anywhere.

But it is the nature and terms of this engagement with China that matters. This must mean engagement that respects, reinforces and is bound by our rules based order, not one that seeks to or allows China to redefine these rules to suit the relativist agenda of autocracies.

Our region must not embrace the path of acquiescence in the face of coercion. Rather we must practically insist on engagement within the clear and established rules, with accountability and transparency.

For our rules based order to prevail in the Indo-Pacific we must continue to work together to shape our region in a way that supports such an outcome.

This is where the Quad and Australia's relationship with Japan and other allies and partners is designed to make a positive contribution.

As Prime Minister, I believed our response must be to reinforce and boost our sovereign resilience.

Firstly, by ensuring a strong economy and restoring strong security, intelligence and defence capabilities.

We must be able to carry our own weight, pay our own way and bring something to the table. We have been achieving this with Australia experiencing one of the strongest economic

records through the COVID Pandemic of any developed nation in the world. We were also successful in boosting our defence spending to 2% of GDP, restoring our defence capability.

Secondly, by expanding our international agency through engagement, alliances and alignments with like minded nations.

This has rightly included major defence and security initiatives such as our defence Reciprocal Access Agreement with Japan and the landmark AUKUS agreement with the United States and the United Kingdom. It has also most recently included new trade agreements with Indonesia, Singapore, the United Kingdom and India, following earlier agreements with Japan and Korea.

Thirdly, by engaging with like minded nations to protect the integrity of the international rules based order.

This means countering the campaigns and influence of autocracies in multilateral fora and institutions with a view to rewriting the rules - one based on relativist principles - in their favour. Our rules based order and institutions were founded following the Second World War on substantially liberal principles that led to the most durable period of peace and prosperity arguably in human history.

Fourthly, supporting a robust and resilient regional architecture that fosters cooperation, collaboration and respect.

To this end I was very pleased that, while as Prime Minister, Australia became the first nation to secure a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with ASEAN, while upgrading the status of our bilateral ties with several ASEAN nations. Like Japan, Australia has always seen ASEAN centrality as fundamental to our Indo-Pacific vision and outlook.

We also initiated our Pacific Step Up with Pacific Island nations,

- significantly increasing our funding and engagement on climate resilience, infrastructure, energy and telecommunications projects, as well as,
- Reinforcing security, defence, cultural, trade and diplomatic links, expanding our presence across the region to unprecedented levels.

The Quad leaders dialogue enables us to pursue all of these objectives simultaneously with our closest like minded and scaled partners in the region.

It is not just about regional security settings. The Quad is not an Indo-Pacific NATO. However, security cooperation is extremely important and as Prime Minister I was pleased to see Australia return to participation in the Malabar defence exercises.

Most significantly it is about the Quad nations demonstrating to the region our positive intent and actions to increase the independent agency and resilience of sovereign states within the Indo-Pacific. As Abe-San said, a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

A key part of the Quad's efforts is for key liberal democracies to demonstrate to the region that liberal democracies can deal with the world's and the region's biggest problems and challenges. That liberal democracies work.

Whether it is practical solutions to tackle climate change and build resilience to the impacts of climate change, how to deliver energy security during a global energy transition while preserving and improving economic living standards, creating jobs and economic opportunities through free and open market economic policies, providing prompt and effective humanitarian support to natural disasters and responding to global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Autocracies falsely believe that only they can effectively deal with these issues - to grow the economy, to develop infrastructure, to protect public health, to foster innovation, to provide security. Their pitch is to offer a false compact to their populations and other nations to deliver on these issues in return for acquiescence.

Liberal democracies in our regions must provide the alternative and the Quad is at the forefront of these efforts.

The Quad now has many lines of effort, including cooperation to provide and deliver vaccines to developing nations across the region, improve health security and boost infrastructure standards in the region.

However as Prime Minister and founding member I was especially keen to ensure that we worked together on critical and emerging technologies, supply chains and supporting a successful energy transition, including

- establishing a Clean-Hydrogen Partnership to strengthen and reduce costs across all elements of the clean-hydrogen value chain,
- establishing clear principles on the design, development and use of critical technologies and harmonising technology standards,
- launching a semiconductor supply chain initiative, and
- supporting 5G deployment and diversification:

I was also keen to promote the role of Australia's critical minerals and rare earth resources sector to ensure broader supply chain competitiveness and security for manufacturing of new technologies critical to our modern economies.

For the Quad to continue to be successful it must jealously guard its agenda and focus.

It must remain focussed on the practical. It must focus on delivering tangible outcomes in the short and longer term.

It must remain focussed on the region. There are other fora for member states to address issues and events outside the region, even where Quad nations are of one mind on such issues. This does not mean that the Quad should not discuss issues such as the invasion of Ukraine, but rather the Quad's discussion (as it was) should be on the implications of this

conflict for the Indo-Pacific region. The Quad must remain focussed on the Indo-pacific and not get distracted.

The Quad must engage in outreach with other like minded democracies around the world who have a direct interest in the Indo-Pacific and those nations in our region who share our interests. This can be achieved through dialogue partners and Quad + fora.

The Quad must provide a framework to guide private sector engagement so as to align the activities of private capital to reinforce the effectiveness of Quad initiatives.

As liberal democracies we favour a market led approach. We favour the engagement of the private sector. We support a business led economy. This will be particularly important in the recovery from COVID-19.

For those who talk about 'building back better', as liberal democracies let this be about restoring market economies, reopening markets, re-engaging in scientific and technological collaboration to enable commercialisation, restoring liberties to societies, returning Governments to a more supporting role than a lead role in our economies.

By embracing a multidimensional and focussed agenda that addresses the economic, security, environmental and political objectives necessary to achieve a free and open Indo-Pacific, the Quad will contribute to the sustained peace and stability of our region, that is always the prerequisite for prosperity and increased well being.

Such peace and stability must not be purchased through acquiescence and appeasement. This is a false peace and offers no genuine security. Our peace and stability must be secured by standing firm on the principles that underpin our great liberal democracies. To achieve as President Ronald Reagan urged, 'peace through strength'.

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