

A Quad Plus?

The Prospects for Australia and New Zealand

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Abstract

Since the first decade of the twenty-first century, a new regional construct has emerged, illustrating the increasingly shifting balance of power: the Indo-Pacific. As a way to operationalize this idea, Australia, India, Japan, and the United States formed the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, informally known as Quad, in 2007. But the initiative did not prosper and was disbanded a year later. Nevertheless, after being dormant for ten years, the Quad was revived in 2017 with the aim to respond to the challenges resulted from the changes in the status quo, especially those associated with the rise of China. In 2020, however, the COVID-19 pandemic became the most pressing threat to the stability of the region and, therefore, the four like-minded partners decided to gather to discuss this issue but this time with the involvement of additional states: the Republic of Korea, Vietnam, and New Zealand first, and then Brazil and Israel. This conjunctural expansion has led to the belief that a Quad Plus might be in the making. Although this enthusiastic view might be initially welcomed by Australia, it raises important questions for a country such as New Zealand that has been quite cautious about its engagement with the idea of the Indo-Pacific. This article aims to explore the potential ramifications of an expanded Quad for Australia and New Zealand, the interests that might come into play for both countries in taking part of such a grouping, and the broader implications for the regional order.

Introduction

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue—informally known as Quad—was initiated by Australia, India, Japan, and the United States in 2007 as a way to materialize the idea that came to be known as the Indo-Pacific, a vast maritime zone comprising the Indian and Pacific Oceans and the states littoral to it. The forum and the military exercises parallel to it were widely seen as a response to the challenges resulting from the changes in the status quo since the turn of the century, especially those associated with the rise of China. This move triggered immediate diplomatic protests from Beijing to the four members, something that is thought to have motivated Australia's withdrawal

from the forum. This was one—if not the main—of the many causes of a long hiatus that finally ended in 2017 with the revival of the group.

In 2020, however, the COVID-19 pandemic became the newest and most pressing threat to the stability of the region. Consequently, the Quad partners decided to gather to discuss this issue. However, this time, they sought the additional involvement of three more states: the Republic of Korea (ROK), Vietnam, and New Zealand. Then, at a later stage, Brazil and Israel were also included. This conjunctural expansion has led to the belief that a broader partnership might be in the making in the form of a Quad Plus.

For Australia, one of the most ardent promoters of the new construct, the potential incorporation of these actors could be seen as a positive step toward wider acceptance of the proposal for an Indo-Pacific order. Nevertheless, such an enthusiastic view raises important questions for a country such as New Zealand, which has been quite cautious about its engagement with the new idea of the region mainly due to its strong economic ties with China.

Therefore, this article aims to explore the questions that an expanded Quad may raise for Australia and New Zealand, how their identities and interests might come into play in deciding to take part of such a potential alliance, as well as the potential effects on their behaviors and their relations with other actors in the region.

The Rise, Fall, and Revival of the Quad

The discussion about the Quad is embedded in a broader debate about the regional—and, to an extent, global—order, that is, the “pattern of activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of the society of states, or international society.”¹ This pattern, however, is not the unintended consequence of international anarchy, but rather a social construction,² for, as Alexander Wendt claims, *anarchy is what states make of it*.³

This means that states act toward others on the basis of the meanings they give to those others, because “it is collective meanings that constitute the structures which organize our actions. Actors acquire identities—relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self—by participating in such collective meanings.”⁴ The Quad, in this sense, is not the mere result of the interaction between sovereign states in an anarchical environment but the product of a new collectively built conception of the regional order: the idea of the Indo-Pacific.

While it is argued that the Quad has its origins in the Tsunami Core Group, which formed to cope with the effects of the Boxing Day Tsunami of 2004, it was not until two years later that the stars really aligned.⁵ In 2006, India and

Japan announced their interest in having a dialogue with other like-minded countries in the Asia-Pacific region on themes of mutual interest.⁶ The United States and Australia soon joined in,⁷ and so the stage was set for the inaugural meeting of Quad 1.0 on 25 May 2007 on the sidelines of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum, which highlighted the democratic nature of the group.⁸

Moreover, in August 2007, Japanese prime minister Shinzō Abe presented to the Indian Parliament the idea of this “broader Asia” taking shape at the “confluence of the two seas” of the Indian and Pacific Ocean, with Japan and India coming together and incorporating the United States and Australia. He then emphasized how the identities of these four states imprinted this new construct with a distinctive seal and a special mission:

Can we not say that faced with this wide, open, broader Asia, it is incumbent upon us two democracies, Japan and India, to carry out the pursuit of freedom and prosperity in the region? . . . From now on let us together bear this weighty responsibility that has been entrusted to us, by joining forces with like-minded countries.⁹

Finally, in September of that year, the four like-minded countries (plus Singapore) held the Quadrilateral Malabar Exercise in the Bay of Bengal, operationalizing the security dialogue.

It is no coincidence that these states decided to form the Quad, for it was their identities as democracies, the meaning they gave to each other, and their collective environment that constituted the basis for action. This shared identity was even invoked by Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh when the newly created group was met with condemnation from China: “I spoke to President Hu and explained that there was no question of ganging up . . . We met to exchange views on development from our experiences as democracies.”¹⁰

Although the ire of Beijing is thought to have led to the withdrawal of Australia in 2008 and, thus, the disappearance of the first iteration of the group, the Quad was revived at the foreign ministerial level on 12 November 2017 as a response to an increasingly changing regional landscape and as a reconfirmation of its original spirit: “The quadrilateral partners committed to deepening cooperation, which rests on a foundation of shared democratic values and principles, and to continue discussions to further strengthen the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region.”¹¹ Since then, the four partners have moved toward closer engagement and cooperation in diverse areas, and that is precisely what lies behind the convening of the ad hoc group now being dubbed Quad Plus.

In the midst of the global pandemic of COVID-19 that started in China in late 2019 and rapidly spread throughout the world in early 2020, US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun summoned foreign officials from India, Japan, and Australia, as well as from New Zealand, the ROK, and Vietnam, for the first of regular weekly meetings to discuss policy responses to the public health emergency.¹² Then in May 2020, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo hosted a foreign ministers' meeting on the novel disease—and the post-pandemic state of the international order—which also included the representatives of the aforementioned countries—except for New Zealand and Vietnam—plus Brazil and Israel.¹³ Consequently, a Quad Plus narrative was triggered in mass media, academic, and strategic circles, although there has not been any official mention of the term. This raises questions about the prospects for such a group to emerge—not only as a result of the health and economic crises, but also of a sense of shared interests and goals.

Official statements from the United States,¹⁴ India,¹⁵ Japan,¹⁶ the ROK,¹⁷ and Vietnam¹⁸ merely highlighted cooperation with partners across the Indo-Pacific region to counter the spread of the virus, develop vaccines, address the challenges of stranded citizens, and mitigate the impact on the global economy (while Brazil and Israel have not released any statements on the meetings yet). However, official statements from Australia and New Zealand went further, calling to “build support for an independent review of the COVID-19 outbreak, emphasise the importance of rules-based open markets,”¹⁹ and uphold the “fundamental Indo-Pacific principles of openness, transparency, respect for sovereignty and adherence to international law.”²⁰ Could this be a sign of a strong commitment from these two countries to the idea of the Indo-Pacific and a possible first step toward closer collaboration in the form of a Quad Plus?

Australia and the Quad

Although now regarded as one of its most ardent advocates, Australia has been blamed for abandoning and, therefore, putting an end to the first iteration of the grouping to avoid enraging China.²¹ Reality, however, was much more complex than that. As former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has claimed in an effort to set the record straight, it was not only his decision of suspending Canberra's participation—which was surprisingly announced by then-Foreign Minister Stephen Smith while in a joint press conference alongside his Chinese counterpart in Beijing²²—that disbanded the forum, but also New Delhi's limited enthusiasm, Washington's reticence, and Tokyo's change of priorities after Abe's first stint as prime minister was suddenly ended in September 2007.²³ Yet, Australia had to do damage control

and, as Prime Minister Scott Morrison has argued, work “patiently to restore trust and confidence.”²⁴

Fast forward to 2017, with trust rebuilt—and a much more assertive China in sight—with the governments of Shinzō Abe, Donald Trump, Narendra Modi, and Malcolm Turnbull on the same page again, the Quad was reconvened. Since then, Australia has continued to actively engage its three partners to deepen their security cooperation. And now, with the world facing a grave health emergency, the incentives for further collaboration are even stronger, for, as the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade media release on the Quad Plus meetings maintains, “the stability, prosperity and resilience of the region will have a direct impact on Australia’s interests.”²⁵

Notwithstanding the lack of recognition of a possible expansion of the original group in any of the official statements of the seven of the nine countries that have been involved in the meetings (Brazil and Israel have not released any), questions about its feasibility are being raised. But, given the many opportunities this scenario could present to advance Australian interests, it would not be too audacious to say that Canberra could positively welcome a Quad Plus. The logic behind this claim rests on Australia’s enthusiasm in reimagining the regional order.

Australia’s first official embrace of the idea of the Indo-Pacific took place in 2013 with the release of the *Defence White Paper*, in which, it was insisted, the country was going through an “economic strategic and military shift to the Indo-Pacific.”²⁶ However, discourse was also accompanied by policy and, therefore, the importance “to create and deepen defence partnerships and contribute to regional security architecture”²⁷ was highlighted. Then in 2016, a new *Defence White Paper* was published, establishing a stable Indo-Pacific region as one of Australia’s three key Strategic Defence Interests.²⁸ The document indicated that Australia will continue to work with the United States under the Australia, New Zealand, and United States (ANZUS) Treaty²⁹ to pursue close collaboration with strategic partners.³⁰ Additionally, the 2017 *Foreign Policy White Paper* asserted Canberra’s determination “to realise a secure, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific, while also strengthening and diversifying partnerships across the globe.”³¹ Due to this emblazonment of the new regional construct across its strategies, Australia has sought to build and deepen strategic partnerships with India, Japan, the ROK, and the countries of Southeast Asia (especially Indonesia and Vietnam), and its close friend New Zealand—apart from its alliance with the United States.

Although Australia’s partnerships with Japan and India have continuously deepened since the first decade of this century, the Indo-Pacific rationale has furthered this process. In 2014, the relationship between Australia and Japan was elevated to a Special Strategic Partnership.³² That same year, building on the basis

of the 2009 strategic partnership³³ and Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation,³⁴ Australia and India extended defense cooperation.³⁵ Then in 2017, the three countries welcomed “continued and deepened trilateral cooperation and dialogue.”³⁶ And more recently, in the context of the ongoing global pandemic, Australia reaffirmed with Japan their commitment to combat the pandemic and build “a prosperous, open and stable post-COVID-19 world, with a focus on the Indo-Pacific region,”³⁷ and decided with India on a Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region³⁸ and elevated the bilateral Strategic Partnership to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Something to note is that the joint statement highlighted the consultations on COVID-19 with Japan, New Zealand, the ROK, Vietnam, and the United States and “welcomed the inaugural Quad ministerial meeting with Japan and the United States in September 2019, and reaffirmed their commitment to ongoing Quad consultations” in the same paragraph.³⁹ Whether this might be a subtle nod to the idea of expanding the Quad or not, deeper multilateral cooperation would be the natural next step for Australia, given the diverse range of partnerships and plans that it has agreed with New Zealand, the ROK, and Vietnam.

Australia and the ROK share values and a common strategic outlook and also enjoy a mature economic relationship, yet cooperation on political, defense, and security issues needs to be enhanced.⁴⁰ In 2009, both countries agreed on a comprehensive Action Plan for Enhanced Global and Security Cooperation, which committed to annual foreign ministers’ meetings and cooperation on a wide range of issues.⁴¹ Then in 2014, a Vision Statement for a Secure, Peaceful and Prosperous Future was issued⁴² and to that followed a Blueprint for Defence and Security Cooperation in 2015, which extended security and defense cooperation.⁴³ And while the 2019 Foreign and Defence Ministers’ 2+2 meeting resulted in a commitment to support a peaceful, prosperous, and stable Indo-Pacific region through closer engagement and coordination between Australia’s Indo-Pacific strategy and the ROK’s New Southern Policy,⁴⁴ the long due strategic partnership that could elevate ties between both like-minded middle powers remains to be agreed.⁴⁵

The relationship with Hanoi, nevertheless, is rather different to the one with Seoul. Although no references are made to shared values between Australia and Vietnam—due to the very different nature of their political systems—official statements have always alluded to shared interests. Consequently, both countries decided to establish a Comprehensive Partnership in 2009; a Plan of Action followed suit.⁴⁶ Then in 2015, Canberra and Hanoi committed to enhance the Comprehensive Partnership and develop a second Plan of Action.⁴⁷ Their growing mutual interests finally led to the establishment of a Strategic Partnership three years later, pledging to work to ensure that the “region remains peaceful, resilient

and shaped by the rules and norms that have prevailed for decades⁴⁸ through wide-range cooperation. This particular case shows that convergent interests can also help create a sense of community—of a shared, collectively built idea of the region—even between states with different identities and values.

On the other hand, the relationship with New Zealand is indeed one based on shared identities and values and a common history that have turned the two countries into “natural allies with a strong trans-Tasman sense of family.”⁴⁹ But, this is not like any other partnership with a like-minded state: it is Australia’s closest and most comprehensive of all its bilateral relationships. Canberra and Wellington’s strong security ties have been formalized through the 1944 Canberra Pact, the 1951 ANZUS Treaty, the 1991 Closer Defence Relations agreement (updated in 2018), and a framework for closer consultation and engagement on defense that has been implemented since 2012 (in accordance with the recommendations of the 2011 Review of the Australia–New Zealand Defence Relationship) and materialized through a long history of joint deployments and operations around the globe. Furthermore, their prime ministers hold annual formal talks and their foreign, trade, and defense ministers meet regularly to discuss the bilateral relationship and their close cooperation in global and regional fora.⁵⁰ And, although Australia recognizes “that New Zealand will make its own judgements on its national interests, and that New Zealand’s military capability choices may not always reflect Australia’s,”⁵¹ more recently, following the pledge made in the 2017 *Foreign Policy White Paper*, Canberra and Wellington have aligned their Pacific Step-up and Pacific Reset policies and have committed to deepen further their essential partnership in support of the economic growth, stability, and security of the region.⁵²

Even though Brazil and Israel have not issued official statements on the Quad Plus meetings, it is worth exploring Australia’s relations with these two countries. Although there are historical links between Australia and Israel, closer cooperation on security issues is of recent advent. Since 2017, both countries have expanded cooperation on national security, defense, and cybersecurity. Accordingly, annual strategic talks between defense officials started in 2018, while in early 2019, a resident defense attaché to the Australian Embassy in Tel Aviv was appointed and the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on cybersecurity cooperation.⁵³ Nevertheless, the bilateral relationship is far from being at the same level as those with Seoul, Hanoi, or Wellington. In the case of Brazil, a Memorandum of Understanding for the Establishment of an Enhanced Partnership between the two countries was signed in 2010 and in 2012 a Strategic Partnership was agreed. The joint statement emphasized priority areas of dialogue and cooperation, such as the global economy, international security, trade and investment, resources

and energy, education, science and technology, development cooperation, environment and sustainable development, and natural disasters. They also agreed to intensify contacts between leaders, ministers, and high-level government officials.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the real potential of the strategic partnership has not been exploited, for there have not been substantial engagements since then.

The establishment and deepening of these Comprehensive and Strategic Partnerships and the strong links that already exist among Australia and New Zealand, the ROK, and Vietnam could serve as the basis for welcoming a potential expansion of the Quad (although the same cannot be said of Israel or Brazil, notwithstanding the Strategic Partnership with the latter). After all, Canberra's priority of working with its "Indo-Pacific partners in other plurilateral arrangements"⁵⁵ could be materialized in the form of a Quad Plus.

New Zealand and the Quad

For the past few years, New Zealand has actively tried to follow a pragmatic and logical approach to the increasingly changing landscape of the region, by focusing on its trade relations with China and other Asian markets while maintaining close cooperation with other like-minded states and traditional partners, such as Australia and the United States.⁵⁶ However, this balancing act between Wellington's economic and geopolitical interests has become a very difficult task.

New Zealand has always tried to espouse an independent foreign policy to avoid the fate common to small countries of being used by their more powerful allies. Notwithstanding, it has also recognized the need for US security architecture in the region and has accepted and subscribed to it, albeit exerting its sovereignty.⁵⁷ Although the United States suspended its ANZUS treaty obligations to New Zealand in the 1980s following a series of disputes due to Wellington's stance on nuclear weapons, repair efforts started in the mid-1990s that restored elements of functionality and resulted in major improvements in the 2000s, laying the foundations for the Wellington and Washington Declarations during the 2010s. Since then, the bilateral relationship has warmed and grown closer, as the US role as a guarantor of regional stability and prosperity—and New Zealand's traditional security partner—has been successively acknowledged.⁵⁸

At the same time, however, Wellington has been dealing with an increasingly prosperous China that has become New Zealand's largest trading partner⁵⁹—due to the Free Trade Agreement signed in 2008 and upgraded in 2019—and a participant in almost all regional and global international organizations of interest to New Zealand, hence in all dimensions, a country that Wellington needs to engage and exchange views with.⁶⁰ Moreover, while Chinese prosperity has benefited New Zealand and several other countries around the world, it has also

turned into a source of distress, for China's ambition to resume what it sees as its rightful place as not only the predominant regional power, but also a major global power, is reshaping the security environment.⁶¹ And even though it is impossible to predict the outcomes of the aforementioned process, there is an ongoing debate about the future of the region: on the one hand, a China-centric vision of the Asia-Pacific; on the other, the Indo-Pacific. This situation, evidently, is of great concern for New Zealand, which has been walking a fine line in its dealings with both sides.

In a speech to the Otago Foreign Policy School in 2018, Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters insisted that an Indo-Pacific configuration makes a lot of sense for some countries, but the Asia-Pacific resonates more with New Zealanders because of their own geography and the term's consistency with—and complementarity to—Wellington's partners' policies.⁶² Nonetheless, rhetoric and policy started shifting that same year, with the Ministry of Defence using the Indo-Pacific concept in its *Strategic Defence Policy Statement* of 2018, as well as breaking new and forthright language in the way New Zealand talked about China and its behavior in the region.⁶³ To that document, followed the *Advancing Pacific Partnerships Executive Report* of 2019, which also engaged with the construct. Moreover, in late 2018, Foreign Affairs Deputy Secretary Ben King presented the ministry's outlook on the Indo-Pacific, adding that New Zealand understands and is quite comfortable with the concept and how its interests are positioned within that.⁶⁴ Furthermore, in 2019, Winston Peters made a departure from his previous articulations and welcomed the engagement with New Zealand's regional partners on the challenges facing the Indo-Pacific in what can be read as the country's first official adoption of the terminology in a foreign policy statement. This embrace, consequently, has resulted in a different approach to Wellington's relations with the Quad partners as well as other countries in the region.

Illustrative of this is Minister of Defence Ron Mark's visit to Washington in January 2020 to meet his counterpart to discuss challenges that New Zealand and the United States share in the Indo-Pacific region, and his later travel to Honolulu for his first visit to the recently renamed US Indo-Pacific Command.⁶⁵ Another example is Jacinda Ardern's visit to Sydney that same month to meet with Scott Morrison, in which they emphasized the familial relationship between Wellington and Canberra and the benefits they can reap from their mutual effort to support an open, inclusive, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region and deepen partnerships with other actors.⁶⁶ Among these partnerships, of course, are those with Tokyo and New Delhi.

New Zealand's relationship with Japan is characterized by common values and shared interests, as well as substantial political, trade, economic, tourism, and

people-to-people links.⁶⁷ Security and defense cooperation is mainly underpinned by a MOU signed in 2013 as a result of the Strategic Cooperative Partnership between both countries.⁶⁸ Yet, in September 2019, Jacinda Ardern visited Japan to meet Shinzō Abe, and both leaders expressed their ambition to further strengthen the Strategic Cooperative Partnership and the security and defense relationship. In this context, they welcomed commencing a joint study toward negotiating a security information-sharing agreement and decided to develop a joint declaration to strengthen coordination and cooperation in the Pacific. At the same time, the leaders raised concerns about the situation in the South China Sea and the East China Sea and insisted in the need to closely cooperate in the cybersecurity and outer space realms. And, as a sign of further alignment, they “reiterated their commitment to working proactively together to maintain and promote a free and open Indo-Pacific region.”⁶⁹

India and New Zealand have long-standing, friendly, and growing ties that go back to the 1800s. The relationship has become a key priority for New Zealand due to India’s strong economy, large population, and international influence and the values and interests they share.⁷⁰ And now, with the emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a strategic concept, both countries find themselves increasingly linked by what they have in common.⁷¹ This situation was emphasized during Winston Peters’ visit to India in February 2020. In a speech to the Indian Council of World Affairs, Peters highlighted the alignment of Wellington’s and New Delhi’s Indo-Pacific policies and the shared commitment to a stable, peaceful, open, and secure region. He also took the chance to call for Indian leadership in regional and global governance issues and announce the launching of a refreshed New Zealand–India strategy for investing in the relationship.⁷² This document sets out a framework for New Zealand government agencies and partners to grow a more enduring strategic relationship with India over the next five years.⁷³

Therefore, while it is generally argued that “New Zealand cannot afford to take sides in the US-China rivalry,”⁷⁴ Wellington’s recent embrace of the Indo-Pacific concept might be a signal of its willingness to cautiously align with the Quad partners, rather than avoiding choosing sides. Adding to this, relations with Beijing have come under increasing strain due to several situations. These include the postponement of plans for a work plan for the Belt and Road Initiative⁷⁵ to determine an agenda that really includes New Zealand’s interests⁷⁶ and values;⁷⁷ Wellington’s ambiguous position on Huawei⁷⁸ due to the identified “significant network security risk;”⁷⁹ New Zealand’s deep concern due to national security legislation relating to Hong Kong;⁸⁰ and Winston Peters’ decision to publicly endorse the admission of Taiwan to the World Health Organization with an observer status.⁸¹

Could this motivate Wellington's interest in joining an expanded version of the Quad? In a visit to India in 2018, New Zealand's Chief of Defence Force Lt Gen Tim Keating queried the objectives of the freshly resurrected group and asserted that he would be very interested in engaging his counterparts "to see what Quad means to them and put a question—do they see a role for New Zealand?"⁸² The most important question is, however, if New Zealand envisions a role for itself within a potential Quad Plus. It is therefore worth asking if its links to the other potential new members could serve as solid foundations for an extended group too.

Brazil and New Zealand enjoy a friendly relationship, assisted by growing people-to-people links and reflected in the growing numbers of Brazilian visitors and students in New Zealand. But, while the two countries are members of the New Agenda Coalition, focused on nuclear disarmament, security and defense cooperation has not been furthered.⁸³ The relationship with Israel has been rather complex in recent years. In 2004, two Israeli citizens were jailed for attempting to gain New Zealand passports illegally and working with organized criminal gangs. Then-Prime Minister Helen Clark insisted that the two men were Mossad agents and that such acts were a violation of the country's sovereignty. New Zealand then imposed diplomatic sanctions on Israel and demanded an apology.⁸⁴ The formal apology arrived in 2005 signed by then-Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, and friendly diplomatic relations were resumed.⁸⁵ Then in 2016, New Zealand co-sponsored United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334, which condemned the establishment of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory. The move prompted Israel's decision to recall its ambassador to New Zealand and ban New Zealand's ambassador from Israel.⁸⁶ A few months later, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu decided to downgrade Israel's diplomatic ties with New Zealand by not returning Israel's ambassador to Wellington and leaving only a chargé d'affaires.⁸⁷ It was not until June 2017 that diplomatic relations between New Zealand and Israel were restored after a letter from then-Prime Minister Bill English expressing regret.⁸⁸ The rapprochement, nevertheless, has not resulted in closer engagement since then.

Relations with Seoul and Hanoi, on the other hand, are close and strong. New Zealand and the ROK cooperate in regional and global fora and have agreements for film, science and technology, education, and Antarctica projects, as well as a Free Trade Agreement, which was signed in 2015. Additionally, a defense relationship has developed out of New Zealand's involvement in the Korean War. Since then, New Zealand continues to support efforts to bring peace and security to the Korean Peninsula and to contribute a small number of New Zealand Defence Force personnel to the United Nations Command Military Armistice

Commission.⁸⁹ These links have also led to the signing of the Information Sharing Agreement in 2012 and the Defence Materiel Cooperation Arrangement in 2019. Furthermore, Hyundai Heavy Industries is currently constructing a new supply ship for the Royal New Zealand Navy. Seoul has also committed to the Christchurch Call to Action to eliminate violent extremist content online, which resulted from the attacks of 15 March 2019 against New Zealand's Muslim community. There is also strong regional and multilateral cooperation between both countries—especially in the Pacific—born out of common interests and shared values.⁹⁰

In the case of Vietnam, political, trade, defense and security, and people-to-people links have grown closer and stronger since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1975, and especially since the agreement of the Comprehensive Partnership in 2009. In addition, trade ties have been underpinned by the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement on Trans-Pacific Partnership, signed in 2009 and 2018, respectively.⁹¹ Building on that momentum, and driven by their growing shared interests, common outlook, and mutual trust, Wellington and Hanoi decided to formally elevate their bilateral relationship to a Strategic Partnership in July 2020. Through this, both countries committed to deepening bilateral political cooperation through frequent high-level exchanges—particularly regular meetings between prime ministers and annual meetings between foreign, trade, and defense ministers—and closer defense cooperation, including through high-level defense visits, port calls, policy consultations, strategic dialogues, education and training, United Nations peacekeeping operations, intelligence exchanges, information sharing, maritime security cooperation, and enhanced coordination in regional fora.⁹²

New Zealand has insisted it needs “to keep working on deepening political partnerships across the region and with other partners” and, above all, to put its “principles into action, maintaining the ethos of partnership and respect that has underpinned New Zealand's engagement to date.”⁹³ In this context, Wellington's recent engagements with the United States, Australia, Japan, India, the ROK, and Vietnam (unlike those with Brazil and Israel) have the potential to serve as an excellent foundation on which to build the Quad Plus.

Conclusions

Imagining a potential expansion of the Quad is just another sign of the times. Beijing's increasingly assertive behavior and China's rivalry with the United States have created a hostile environment in the Indo-Pacific, and this situation has raised crucially important questions for actors such as Australia and New

Zealand, both of which could immediately feel the consequences of the potential conflicts between the two leading powers of the region.

For Australia, an ardent supporter of the Indo-Pacific construct and a founding member of the Quad, the inclusion of the ROK, Vietnam, and New Zealand to the group would be a logical and very positive step forward. Canberra's close links to Seoul, its Strategic Partnership with Hanoi, and its special relationship "built on deep mutual security interests, shared values and long-standing people to people linkages"⁹⁴ with Wellington are naturally an ideal platform for such an expansion.

Wellington's recent invocation of the Indo-Pacific in its dealings with Canberra, New Delhi, Tokyo, and Washington and its recent inquiries about its potential role within the security dialogue might be signs of a shift in New Zealand's strategy of avoiding choosing sides in the ongoing strategic competition. Added to the increasingly complicated relationship with Beijing, this new resolve may result in "closer New Zealand involvement with the Quad mechanism, which would be welcomed by all current Quad members."⁹⁵ Additionally, the close relationship with the ROK and Vietnam could also help trigger the interest in building a Quad Plus with them on board.

Although Brazil and Israel have been part of the Quad Plus narrative, their geographical position, outside the boundaries of the Indo-Pacific region; their perceived lack of interest in the ad hoc group, as evidenced by the absence of official statements; and lack of firmer bases for closer collaboration with these partners might result in a Quad Plus of only seven members instead of nine.

Nevertheless, any attempt to expand the Quad could use some lessons from its own past. If the four democracies want to include other Indo-Pacific partners, they have to think carefully about the seal they want to imprint into the partnership, for, as Rory Medcalf warned back in 2008, "such ventures will be more sustainable if based on convergent interests and the ability to contribute rather than on shared values."⁹⁶ In this sense, softening the discourse about the democratic identity of the group might be wise, for, in that way, non-democracies such as Vietnam could be easily integrated.

In that same spirit, the Quad must clearly communicate its purpose as a forum for information sharing and policy coordination⁹⁷ and its agenda of convergent interests to avoid any misperceptions. While Beijing does not hide its displeasure at certain aspects of the existing order and is certainly guilty of not always following its rules,⁹⁸ the debate about the expansion of the Quad Plus is not about the world ganging up on China. As Medcalf has also insisted, it is about "rather seeking safety in numbers: creating a context where China cannot coerce us individually, and has to engage with norms, rules and material realities set by a community of interests."⁹⁹

An international society exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests, and perhaps some common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another—such as that they should respect one another’s independence, that they should honor agreements into which they enter, that they should be subject to certain limitations in exercising force against one another, and that they should cooperate in the working of common institutions.¹⁰⁰ In this sense, the prospects of a Quad Plus for Australia and New Zealand could be very positive, for if they build it—along with the United States, Japan, India, the ROK, and Vietnam—around a convergence of interests, a new international society with clear rules that can be followed by all the powers in the Indo-Pacific may emerge, and this can lead to an improved regional and, by extension, global order. ☪

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