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UP CIDS DISCUSSION PAPER 2019-04

Structural Change and Power Balancing in the Indo-Pacific: An Australian View of the Region's Alliance Politics

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Structural Change and Power Balancing in the Indo-Pacific: An Australian View of the Region's Alliance Politics

WILLIAM TOW

ABSTRACT

This discussion paper provides an analytical overview of the structural changes occurring in international relations and its strategic implications to power relations in the Indo-Pacific. It explores the changing framework in the region, as strategic studies scholars and political actors shifted from the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific region as a term of reference. The change is more than a geographical one; it is essentially about vision and ideas. The notion for connectivity that the new regional framework presents positive economic and political opportunities for major powers within and outside the region. Nonetheless, such expansive frameworks are also hampered by structural characteristics, mainly the changing nature of the threats in the international order that are driven by systemic changes in domestic factors. These forces come in play when a sufficient number of the domestic populace begin to feel alienated or marginalized, and the resulting changes have implications for the conduct of international relations.

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The main focus of this discussion is structural change in international relations, and its strategic implications. It is natural for those working in the field of international relations (IR) to think in terms of international systemic environments and, in particular, to muse over

various crossroads and benchmarks in IR. One can certainly take a look at the treaties of Westphalia in the mid-17th century Europe as the start of an international rules-based order. At its advent, large components of the Western approach to IR have been adopted in the Asia-Pacific or Indo-Pacific region in the post-World War II era. Another benchmark would be the rise of Germany after unification by the Prussian state and the challenge that Bismarckian Germany and Kaiser Wilhelm II posed against the British Empire. This was then succeeded by the crystallization of a bipolar world in the aftermath of World War II between the so-called East-West blocks and the eventual demise of the Soviet Union in 1991. Perhaps, commensurate with that, the rise of China—a great and powerful China—which now conveys the prospects of yet another bipolar world. This is what the speech of United States of America's Vice President Mike Pence outlined in October 2018. He was essentially indicating that we may be returning to an era of a bipolar geo-strategic competition. It remains to be seen as to what extent that is going to be a confirmation of structural change, and whether the publicity surrounding Vice President Pence's speech has generated any impact. But clearly, many do interpret that what he had to say was a real bellwether on how to look at international relations and strategic studies in present times.

There is an interesting debate going on within Australia, apart from how the country responds to China a growing power and the possible retrenchment of its great and powerful American friend. That debate essentially is about what are we actually going to call the region and why do we call it so. It has become the fashion to refer to what we used to call the Asia-Pacific region as the Indo-Pacific region. It is because there is an idea which takes inspiration perhaps from people like Robert Kaplan and other scholars who have written about the so-called “connectivity syndrome.” Essentially, it envisions the bridging of the Eurasian land mass through waters emanating from the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, through the Bay of Bengal and moving east towards the Andaman Islands, continuing to the world's most critical choke point, the Malacca Strait. This path goes further to cover the South and East China Sea—sea lanes of communication towards the great industrial heartland of Northeast Asia from whence about 57% of Australia's exports find their way.

If there was something to interrupt that pattern and if parts of Northeast Asia were to explode, the Australian economy would be in a dire situation. So there is a renewed effort to conceptualize not just the geographic frame of reference, but the idea which underlies it. Some people talk about China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as being a replay of the maritime Silk Road during the Ming Dynasty. China looks to the West just as India, for some time, has cultivated a "Look East" strategy towards the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) area and towards East Asia. So what we are seeing here is the beginning of a bridge.

During a conference at the European Study Center of the Australian National University (ANU), a contingent of representatives from the European Community headquarters in Brussels talked about this notion of connectivity as an opportunity for the Europeans at a time when the inclination and the capacity of the US to participate in post-war-era global affairs has become increasingly put in question. There was an opportunity for Europe to search for new and independent opportunities to deal with the Indo-Pacific on its own terms. Some would say that this really is nothing new. The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) meets once every two years, but there has been criticism of these venues as lacking in substance. Nonetheless, given the forces of structural change which are now in effect, it looks like the Europeans are looking for new opportunities to globalize their economic agendas. This is particularly ironic given the ongoing internal struggles within Europe in terms of the Brexit crisis. What we have are multiple initiatives from different European parties. The British, for example, are talking about a partial return to a truly Great Britain that is active in other regions of the world, apart from greater Europe. It remains to be seen as to what extent infrastructure building and finding common interests between both ends of the Eurasian landmass will go. This makes 2018 a rather exciting time for both analysts of international relations, and perhaps, historians looking for repetitive patterns of interaction that make the difference in terms of where our world is going and why it is going there. So it is more than just geography; it is essentially about vision. It is essentially about ideas. However, what is missing here is specifically a definitive role for the US. Because, after all, we are now moving

into a neo-Jacksonian period of American history, which President Donald Trump has labeled as the “America First” posture. America is becoming increasingly consumed about issues such as immigration, especially on its southern borders. To what extent will trade wars that are initiated out of Washington, D.C. redress the grievances of those members of the conservative right-wing Republican Party who believe that the US has been taken advantage of by its allies, as well as its potential rivals, for decades, sapping the strength and viability of the American economy in the process?

It might be useful when discussing the European vision of connectivity with regard to the Indo-Pacific region to take a look at the perceptions of some key players. For instance, take Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s approval of the term ‘Indo-Pacific.’ The Japanese foreign ministry has come out and called for the “free and open Indo-Pacific region.” The reason that this is appealing to Mr. Abe, apart from his history of proposing “diamond” relationships between New Delhi, Tokyo, Canberra, and Honolulu, is that he has a long history of attempting to implement this type of strategic grand design, which goes all the way back to his first term of office in the previous decade. Japan likes the notion of the Indo-Pacific because it allows Japan a way to reach beyond the traditional confines of its bilateral alliance with the US. Remember that Japan has been traditionally dependent upon US power to essentially shape its own security and destiny. In addition, the Indo-Pacific framework provides an opportunity for Japan to relate more effectively with the broader Asian region in a way that Japan's own history is not going to become an impediment. Because of course, Japan has found difficulty in exercising full candor in terms of its historic role during the Second World War. Perhaps this is a way for Japan to actually leapfrog that particular problem and be perceived as a positive force for shaping a new type of region in our time.

From its end, India likes the notion of a broader Indo-Pacific region because this acknowledges India's vital role in Asia's future. In the past, India has been somewhat frustrated with its traditional “Look East” policies, as many in the ASEAN region have said that India has

a history of talking big, but not necessarily following through with actual substance. Here is a renewed opportunity for India to exercise its prerogatives with a regenerated sense of vigor, accompanied by some creativity. In his keynote speech at the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS)' Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi incorporated a bit of the Indian vision. To quote, "India does not see the Indo-Pacific region as a strategy or as a club of limited members, nor as a grouping that seeks to dominate. And by no means do we consider it as directed against any country. A geographical definition, as such, cannot be."¹ This reinforces the notion that the Indo-Pacific is more than just about geography and more about a bigger idea. For Prime Minister Modi, what the Indo-Pacific could be is a free, open, and inclusive entity with the ASEAN as the central and crucial core to the future of the region. It can be a rules-based order based upon respect for "sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as equality of all nations, irrespective of size and strength..."² Modi also points out that "[c]onnectivity is vital... we must also build bridges of trust...we [must] not return to the age of great-power rivalries."³ There are several things that we can take away from this particular passage. One is that, in a very oblique fashion, it justifies India's position of non-alignment and its post-war history of non-alignment, which is to avoid blocks and to cultivate instead a fluid and more open region envisioned by past Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summits, one that cultivates and nurtures free trade in the region. It acknowledges ASEAN centrality. One of the great concerns of the ASEAN grouping about an Indo-Pacific regional framework is the possibility of it undermining the notion of ASEAN centrality by providing openings on the part of other great and middle powers in the region to essentially write the script for the characters of the Indo-Pacific region.

¹ "Keynote Speech, Shri Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India," 17th Asia Security Summit, The IISS Shangri-La Dialogue, <https://www.iiss.org/events/shangri-la-dialogue/shangri-la-dialogue-2018>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Indonesia and Australia tend to generally support the concept of the Indo-Pacific Region. Indonesia, of course, is nestled between the Pacific and the Indian Oceans, with thousands of its islands within the archipelago. However, it is important to consider that Indonesia in 2018 is not the equivalent of Indonesia under Sukarno. Sukarno truly had geo-strategic ambitions in terms of having Indonesia competing as a formidable power in the Indian Ocean. The current Indonesian president, Joko Widodo, has mentioned about building up Indonesian naval capability and projecting it west of the country into the Indian Ocean, but not to the same degree as the inaugural Indonesian president. Certainly, Australia has not reached the point that it is pushed to go out and buy F1-11 bombers, in the same way that it reacted to some of Sukarno's rhetoric several decades before. Australia has the longest coastline of any country situated within the Indian Ocean circumference, and so it is interested in actually developing both its economic and strategic capacity to reflect this geographic reality.

Finally, we have the United States. Donald Trump delivered a very interesting speech at the APEC Summit last November 2017. He essentially emulated, to the extent that he could, the Japanese notion of a free and open Indo-Pacific region operating as a rule-based order, by further emphasizing the freedom of navigation for maritime powers such as the United States. Essentially, Mr. Trump is able to conjure a warning to China not to attempt to alter or transform this fluid, free, and open Indo-Pacific region. The problem with this is that Mr. Trump says one thing and does another, which tends to contradict his rhetoric. Most notable is his insistence that the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is a non-starter. He withdrew the US out of TPP the day that he assumed office. Instead, he is going to recreate the world by negotiating a series of bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs) that have more favorable terms for US trade in the region. However, this grand plan has not materialized, with only one or two exceptions. South Korea has renegotiated a bilateral treaty, but to what extent it is more advantageous comparative to what was previously in effect is debatable. Some scholars would argue that Mr. Trump has essentially taken this approach because it is the opposite of what former President Barack Obama did in terms of the pivot strategy. Anything

that Obama did, Trump is going to do differently. Of course, this is a simplistic conclusion to draw about the sophistication of Mr. Trump's geopolitical thinking, but it is not totally inaccurate. It does, however, provide a bit of an idea on how some of the key players in this Indo-Pacific region are approaching their own destinies, and how, perhaps, they justify their own behavior, as we see a new form of regional politics unfold.

Global change

What are the some of the structural characteristics of the Eurasian land bridge—as Robert Kaplan would call it—and of global change as it is currently unfolding? First is a perceived erosion of Western power in this region, and more specifically, of American power, due to Mr. Trump's “America First” rhetoric and the internal conflict within the European community caused by Brexit. But we have to be careful about overgeneralizing, as Mr. Trump, through the US Department of Defense, came out in December with a national security statement in which he indicated that the country was determined to compete with Russia and China, which are labeled as specific geopolitical or strategic rivals to the US. So again, there are apparent oscillations. On one hand, Mr. Trump is saying America has to look at its own affairs at home first. But on the other hand, he releases a very Washington establishment-type national security statement that essentially adheres to the orthodoxy of his predecessors, implicating that American leadership is looking to maintain American presence in the Asian region. All of this is muddled by Mr. Trump's love affair—to use his own words—with Kim Jong-un, and his brotherly relationship with Vladimir Putin.

Secondly, as we move towards this brave new order in the Indo-Pacific region, we are finding some distinct properties that are taking center stage on a more distinct basis than before. One is the rise of nationalism. One of the ironies of contemporary history is that the so-called ‘Big Three’—China, Russia, and the United States—are all going through nationalist stages, both as intensified versions of

their historical nationalist episodes and as a result of support for various forms of populism. In the case of China, President Xi Jinping is playing to the netizens by asserting that the legitimacy of the communist party is tied directly to the perceived or actual economic progress in China and to the broadening of the Chinese middle class. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) argues that it would be better if Xi aligns his ideological agenda to the country.

In the case of Russia, President Vladimir Putin essentially attempts to make up for what he considers to be the greatest modern tragedy of our time, which was the demise of the Soviet Union. And in the case of Mr. Trump, it is the real or imagined sapping of American respect and dignity in the eyes of the rest of the world.

James Rosenthal has argued that all international relations, changes, and trends can be traced back to developments in the domestic scene. The forces of change come into play when sufficient numbers of the domestic populace of a particular country begin to feel alienated or marginalized, and removed from the hope of achieving a better life. People begin to blame the system that is in effect, and therefore demand fairly substantial adjustments to this particular system. This is what can be observed in the US, as Trump's support base—the so-called Republican base—are the folks that feel marginalized. They feel as if they have missed out on the good life. Some of them are undergoing health crises (mainly in terms of the opioid crisis in the US) and feel that the government in Washington, D.C. is largely indifferent or even detached from them. The perceptions of structural change that we are now seeing as the driving force of systemic changes in the global order are related to these domestic factors. In the case of the US, domestic politics drives foreign policy to a large extent.

In all of these countries, there exists a rather dangerous convergence of nationalistic tendencies that compound the prospects for miscalculation, for instance, countries not picking up from the other end of the telephone line or China warning off US or other regional navy contingencies in the South China Sea. Another is China weighing up the various implications of incorporating Taiwan back

into the mainland, with making China whole again and overcoming the so-called “Century of Humiliation” as the irredentist factor. This is the stuff of possible volatility, a tendency that needs to be watched very carefully. Rosenthal is correct in saying that significant numbers of people feel that they are becoming increasingly disenfranchised, that the system in place is unresponsive to their own understandable desires to have a better life. Then, questions of legitimacy come into play, resulting in various political leaders harnessing the forces of populism, which have been utilized by leaders such as Xi, Putin, and Trump. Even in the case of India, Mr. Modi has a reputation of being a champion of Hinduism. What emerges is the politics of division, which is essentially a rationale for genuine politics of change, which, in turn, makes the international environment change in substantial ways. The real danger of this—and Rosenthal understood this very well—is that this type of process intensifies the prospects for miscalculation. Robert Jervis of Columbia University would call it ‘misperception.’ What is universal about all of this is that at the end of the day, people really do aspire to live better lives, and leaders have the option to either (a) respond to that need legitimately or (b) deflect that system of frustration to maintain their own power base. Emotional factors come into play, which make the prospects for miscalculation and conflict escalation greater. The remarkable thing about the post-war period is that there is a general consensus that even though the Chinese were dissatisfied with the ways and rules of the system that seem to advantage the West, China was very much a beneficiary in terms of its own economic development. Even though the Russians felt that the demise of the Soviet Union was a historical tragedy, they were still selling natural gas, and there was a new Russian oligarchy that was created, providing enough trickle-down to the Russian economy. There was a prospect for a certain period that the Russian economic situation would gradually improve, but again it has come to pass. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

Mr. Xi has used the idea of corruption very effectively in order to consolidate his own domestic power base in China. But there are also other aspects of corruption which are evident again in other societies and in other key players in the Indo-Pacific story. The Russian example is Mr. Putin's cronies in the state's oil business and the arrest

of legitimate political opposition figures. In the case of Mr. Trump, just read the headlines about the Mueller investigation. It is almost overwhelming in many ways, especially in terms of how we talk about perceived corruption. Many people would extend that discussion into the European community, claiming or arguing that at the end of the day, Europe is nothing more than a disguised hierarchy to essentially exercise authority over the individuals' sovereignty, the example being what Brexit is all about.

One can take a look at the Southeast Asian sub-region's recent elections, where there are a number of different examples. Essentially, the forlorn conclusion is that corruption is indeed a phenomenon of our time and it seems to be intensifying, rather than going in the opposite direction.

Other very interesting trends in the present are the overheated economies and debt diplomacy. Overheated economies are seen in how the United States under Mr. Trump legislated tax cuts for the top one or two percent in the US, which is the business cronies, or whatever you want to call them. And the price that he and the country pays is a GNP current growth of 3.5 or 4 percent a year, which Mr. Trump thinks is a miraculous recovery of the American economy with a looming 1 to 1.5 trillion-dollar deficit ten years down the line. So, is the United States really going to be made great again, facing this type of prospect? This type of specter of rampant inflation might make the 2007–2008 and the 2008–2009 global financial crisis look like a sand pile in comparison. China is obviously going through a problem of attempting to control what has been clearly an overinvestment in infrastructure. There are clear problems in terms of developing a viable middle class and a credible social support system. What are going to be the implications of that? Russia is actually experiencing a declining economy, one that has been previously oil-dependent or resource-dependent and, perhaps, one supplemented by military sales, but not much else going for it at the present time. So, how are these factors going to play in the stability or instability of the Indo-Pacific region and the world as we know it?

Then, there is the changing nature of threat itself. One of the things that strategic studies analysts are consumed or preoccupied with is ‘threat-centric analysis.’ Many would say that the whole point of an alliance, as Steven Walt (1985) defined with his definitive article of the last two decades, *Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power*, is that there is a mutually perceived threat and that if you collaborate with someone that feels the same threat, you are going to be able to deter more effectively or contain that threat more effectively. We are now finding that these alliances are outdated or outmoded. That would certainly be China’s position. There are other threats that are coming in to play which do not have that much to do with nation-states threatening war against other nation-states. Non-traditional security crises are beginning to overwhelm the traditional frame of reference of what ‘threat’ is all about. Obviously at the top of the list would be climate change. What is going on, of course, is denial of climate change. There is a school of thought in Australia that would love for coal supplies to continue to be in demand and as the country’s top export. We would like to see coal continue to be applied in a way that Australian householders would not have to pay such high energy bills. But most of all, Mr. Trump seems to sideline the discussions on climate change, as it gets in the way of his vision of high power growth for the US economy.

On the issue of global pandemics, Ebola continues to rear its ugly head. We have just come through another outbreak in Africa, but there are other pandemics that originate from other parts of the world. We are certainly aware of SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome). We are certainly aware of Bird Flu. But the question is, where and when will the next big pandemic happen? It is easy for people to forget about the great Spanish flu, where millions of people died of the disease compared to those who died in combat during World War I. The disease burned itself out after about a year or a year and a half. But there was not much that the technology of the times could do to cope with or to respond to the pandemic. We are finding that in a world of seven and a half billion people—which in 30 years is projected to be around 10 billion people—living in concentrated, denser urban areas is the stuff of which pandemics can be made. So are we really thinking clearly about this?

Another global factor to consider is demography. The world's population is actually getting older, like what we already see in Japan. China is about to intensify its own challenge with growing elder population and this is connected with the lack of social safety nets in China. What does China do about the day-in day-out pocketbook security of its populace? This is compounded by questions on food and water security. It is going to get harder to grow crops and to depend on reliable food supplies if the climate is going pear-shaped.

This is followed by terrorism and populism, which are problems we are already highly desensitized to. There is no shortage of extremist movements or other forms of terrorism. These are some of additional factors that all geo-politicians and strategic studies scholars have to begin to incorporate into their paradigms of concern.

Australian perceptions and responses to the traditional post-war Australian-American alliance are being debated in Australia today. The fundamental bottom-line question is how should the country respond to a world where Australia's great and powerful friend America becomes less great and less powerful in the next decade or so. But further complicating this question is whether Australia's traditional post-war great and powerful friend does or does not really care about extending the same types of commitment that it has extended before. Mr. Trump seems to go back and forth on that, depending on what day you read the quotes. Australia has had about three prime ministers in the last year and a half or two years. At the end of the day, Australia is becoming an insecure country because of its domestic political context. The stability of the country's democratic institutions is coming under increased question. Case in point: predictability going out the window, when in October 20, 2018, by-election Australia had the governing Liberal-National Coalition lose the electorate of Wentworth to an independent political candidate Kerryn Phelps, who campaigned under a vigorous climate change platform for the first time in about a century. This was not a situation the liberal government wanted to unfold, particularly with such a safe electorate as Wentworth. An Australia that feels less secured, then, feels less secure about itself and its own identity, its own political stability, and its own economy, the result being that Australia becomes

insecure about traditional conduits towards the rest of the world. Most notable is the US–Australia alliance, which still has about 75 percent support according to polling data. But the Australian electorate has demonstrated a rather distinct capacity to differentiate between the value of the American alliance on one hand and the lack of reliability for Donald Trump on the other. Trump is getting about 28 percent support in Australia at present.

How does Australia respond to this rapidly changing situation? Well, one of the responses is to seek out other traditional friends in the region to solidify what people like Patrick Cronin at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, D.C., and others would call the ‘spoke-to-spoke’ or the web-based security relations. Secondly is to continue to hang on to the multilateral organizations Australia has supported in the past, including something that looks like a possible successor to TPP. But Australia is hedging in that regard, having joined the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), China's new banking initiative.

Case studies

One case study would be the Australia-Japan relationship, which, at first glance, looks like it is becoming increasingly intense and increasingly cordial. But in fact, it is not quite that simple, as the Australians and the Japanese, for quite some time, have engaged in so-called ‘two-plus-two’ summits, where the defense ministers and foreign ministers of both countries get together annually and talk about the affairs of the world. Australia and Japan participate with the United States in the so-called Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD). The actual purpose and energy of the TSD have never been totally certain. When it was raised to the ministerial level in late 2005, the expectation of then US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was that this might be an instrument of containment against the rising Chinese power or perhaps against the North Korean nuclear situation. But Ms. Rice was headed off at the past at the inaugural Sydney meeting in March 2006. The Japanese Foreign Minister and his Australian counterparts said that they had a different conception of

the organization's purpose, with a focus on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief-type operations, where they can score very good public relations by organizing coherently response mechanisms to the disaster-prone Indo-Pacific or Asia-Pacific region. In fact, that legacy goes back to the post-earthquake tsunami at the end of 2004, where Japan and Australia, along with India, formed the core group to organize disaster relief and rebuild operations. For example, for the first time since the end of the Second World War, there were US army contingents in Indonesia's Aceh province leading reconstruction efforts in the aftermath of that disaster. But for some reasons, the TSD has evolved, perhaps by osmosis, to involve more of a positive security organization, rather than a threat-centric organization. That being said, the TSD has more recently been galvanized by mutual collaboration against the North Korean nuclear threat, so it is beginning to shift back towards something that looks more like a traditional security response or traditional security dialogue. Japan attempted to sell some submarines to Australia, which was the first serious Japanese effort to sell submarines commercially abroad. Japan was in veritable shock when the French won the submarine bid, because after all, Tony Abbott had allegedly promised Shinzo Abe that the Japanese submarine type would win the day. There was an insistence from both sides that this does not damage overall intensification of Australia-Japan spoke-to-spoke relations, but both sides are probably approaching this bilateral relationship that has developed with a more cautionary perspective. Gone are the ebullient days during the first encounters between then Prime Minister Tony Abbott and Shinzo Abe, which perhaps rivaled the love affair between John Howard and George Bush, Jr. However, Australia and Japan are still pretty close. They have a number of intelligence agreements—there were intelligence-sharing agreements struck in 2012, a defense equipment and technology transfer agreement in 2014, and the Japanese participation in various US-Australian exercises, the Talisman Saber, from November 2015 onwards. But at the same time, the lost submarine sale of Japan left a bit of a sour taste in Tokyo. The bilateral relationship has not totally recovered. Like Australia, Japan is moving to hedge its economic relations with Trump's America and China, by gradually warming its trading relations with China. Mr.

Abe is slated to visit China in the not too distant future, and that is hedging.

The second case study would be the Australia–Singapore comprehensive strategic partnership, which was signed in 2013. This complements a long-standing defense relationship going all the way back not just to the Five Power Defense Arrangements, of which Singapore and Australia were the spearhead affiliates, but even further back to the Cold War history with the Commonwealth Strategic Reserve and the Australian participation in the so-called ‘Konfrontasi’ where the Australian Defense Forces essentially defended the integrity of Malaysia. The Australians and the Singaporeans now conduct overseas training together. There is a special exercise, ‘Sing-aroo,’ which is now conducted each year off the coast of Darwin, simulating operations in the South China Sea. Ironically, the port of Darwin is actually now owned by a company dominated by Chinese interests. So the intrigue goes on. There is a delicate diplomatic strategic dance in terms of the resurgence—or the alleged resurgence—of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue among India, Australia, Japan, and the United States. The four countries met on the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum in November 2001. But Australia is somewhat jaundiced about where the revival of the Quad is going to go for a couple of very good reasons.

First, it was Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd that essentially jettisoned the initial effort to form some type of quadrilateral defense initiative from 2007 to 2008. The Rudd government had just come to power and was very sensitive to the Chinese criticism that the Quad was nothing more than a China containment strategy in disguise.

India has also been sensitive to this type of criticism on the part of China, but there are some other aspects to this. Australia has been frustrated by India’s rejection of the Australian request to participate in the Malabar naval exercises. In June of this year, they were held off the coast of Guam. India feels that full Quad participation in such exercises will alienate China, as Modi applies his own strategies of hedging vis-à-vis China. This is because India does not want a repeat of the Doklam border situation last year which became quite

acute after Chinese and Indian soldiers engaged in hand-to-hand combat after Chinese engineers attempted to construct a road close to the Indian border through Bhutan. The Quad may be appealing in different ways to four different democracies, but there are practical impediments to moving to something that would look like a viable version of an Asian NATO, whether its purpose is to contain China or just to forge an alliance of democracies in the region and in the Indo-Pacific. A viable Quad is not coming anytime soon.

The previous Australian administration under former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and the Obama administration in the United States had negotiated the transfer of some refugees from Nauru. The detention center in Australia had become quite notorious in the eyes of the United Nations and elsewhere in terms of a failure of human rights in the country. Mr. Turnbull had negotiated a deal of finesse with Mr. Obama during Mr. Obama's last days in office to take in some of these refugees to the United States.

Mr. Trump, of course, had run his 2016 presidential campaign largely on the basis of not allowing immigrants to come in illegally to United States and the building of a wall—which is still not being built because Mr. Trump wanted other countries like Mexico to pay for it, after which he changed his tone and decided that maybe the US Congress will build the wall instead. There have been some allocations for funding but nothing has materialized yet. But during the heady days of Trump's first few weeks in office, he called different world leaders and asked why should the US should continue to adhere to the commitment made by a flawed predecessor, the logic being that he did not make a deal with Prime Minister Turnbull. So we are going to essentially aggregate this deal. Mr. Turnbull had to explain patiently to Mr. Trump why it really would not be propitious to cancel the bargain at that particular time. Mr. Trump then described the phone call as the worst phone call that he had with a world leader during his first few days in office. Since then, Mr. Turnbull made a couple of trips to Washington, D.C. While he is no longer Prime Minister, the relationship has been somewhat repaired. This little episode demonstrated that the alliance is more fragile than one might initially conclude, with Australia facing the awful possible choice somewhere

between the Chinese economic conduit—as China is Australia's largest trading partner—and the United States' security alliance. It is probably appropriate to end with a question, and that is, how middle powers—or alliance partners to the United States like Australia, Japan, or South Korea—maintain the rules-based order which has been at the core of the ASEAN rationale, and what is the hope of those who would envision a stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific region?

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