

News from under the Southern Cross (Edition 37): The Quad

1 October

Last week, the Quad, i.e. the Summit Meeting for the four countries of Japan, Australia, the US, and India, took place in person for the first time ever in Washington DC. From my position as the Ambassador of Japan to Australia, I have gathered my thoughts together about this recent development as follows.

1. Welcoming AUKUS

As a preliminary to the Quad Summit Meeting, on the morning of 24 September, Prime Minister Suga met with Prime Minister Morrison to conduct the Japan-Australia Summit Meeting. During the meeting, Prime Minister Suga addressed Prime Minister Morrison, clearly stating that Japan welcomes the establishment of the Australia-UK-US Security Partnership (AUKUS) announced on 16 September.

Foreign Minister Motegi had already conveyed to his Australian counterpart Foreign Minister Payne that Japan welcomed the formation of AUKUS. However the fact that this time around it was explicitly welcomed at the leadership level and announced in public is profoundly significant.



The Japan-Australia Summit Meeting (Source: Prime Minister's Office of Japan)

2. A powerful counter to economic coercion and attempts to change the status quo

Furthermore, both leaders shared their strong opposition, in the face of the trade difficulties that Australia is currently confronted by and attempts by emerging countries to run rampant in the South China Sea and East China Sea, to any economic coercion and any unilateral attempt to challenge the status quo.

It is therefore significant that both Japan and Australia are resolutely determined to champion the 'Rule of Law' in the Indo-Pacific region.

3. A major milestone

This Quad meeting will without doubt be looked upon a few dozens years later as a major watershed moment. It's not just because of the significance in realising the first in-person leaders' summit for four nations who are major players in the Indo-Pacific region, but also because agreement has been reached on the path forward, to be built upon at future annual Quad summit meetings. This is of historical significance.

In relation to the Quad, detailed specific initiatives for measures concerning the distribution of vaccines, the development and safeguard of critical and emerging technologies, and the issue of climate change are reported. Expectations are that in the future, cooperation between the Quad members will advance, will be multi-faceted and span many areas, and will make a major contribution to the realisation of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific."



The first face-to-face Summit Meeting of the Quad (Source: Prime Minister's Office of Japan)

4. The Quad and AUKUS

Since the recent launch of AUKUS, from time to time I hear questions such as “what is its relationship to the Quad?”

In my understanding, the Quad and AUKUS are not mutually exclusive, but have a complimentary relationship. Firstly, AUKUS is focused on defence and security. As an initial specific initiative, the three countries of Australia, the UK and the US have begun to cooperate on the introduction of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia.

In contrast to this, the Quad is a vehicle to realise a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”. Its areas of interest are not restricted to defence and security, but are in fact multifaceted, from infrastructure development to counter-terrorism measures, cyber security, trade and investment, to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, etc. And it is precisely because of these multifaceted interests that at present, working groups have been established to provide a response to COVID-19, critical and emerging technologies, and climate change and are steadily producing results.



The leaders of the 4 countries of Japan, the US, Australia, and India

5. Advancement through a multitiered framework

A “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” cannot possibly be realised by the formation of the 4 nation Quad and the 3 nation AUKUS alone. This is precisely why in the Quad joint statement special reference was made to the importance of ASEAN’s “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific” and the EU’s “EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific”.

The guarantee of freedom of navigation and overflight, the realisation of quality infrastructure and the improvement of connectivity between such infrastructures, the creation of an environment resistant to threats from terrorism and cyber-attacks, the liberalisation of trade and investment, and the fulfilment of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, all of which aim to be realised under a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”, are there for the public good of all nations in the region.

This is indeed the reason why it is important that the Quad cooperates with those like-minded countries such as ASEAN and the EU to vigorously promote its vision.

6. Expansion of the TPP

On that note, I should make mention of the significance of expanding the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). This agreement was already concluded by 8 countries, including Japan and Australia, and at present the 3 nations of Malaysia, Brunei and Chile are working on domestic procedures to conclude the agreement. The UK is also presently negotiating its accession.

Last week, both China and Taiwan formally submitted requests to accede to the TPP. Other Asian countries including Thailand are also showing their interest in the TPP. Now that many countries are about to change course in trade in the pursuit of the realisation of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”, attention is once again being paid to movements by the US.

Given the changes in the strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific, and if Australia is able to obtain nuclear-powered submarines through the epoch-making support by the US such as offer of relevant technologies. I have high hopes that it will only be a matter of time before the US, which previously led negotiations on the TPP, again pays attention to its significance despite domestic hurdles. This is why it is vital for Japan and Australia to both reach out in this regard.



The 5th CPTPP Commission Meeting held on 1 September (hosted by Japan)
It welcomed the accession of Peru into the CPTPP. (Source: Cabinet Secretariat)

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