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Quadrilateral Security Dialogue in the Asia Pacific Region and its adaptation to maritime security issues in the Arctic Region, Part IV

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1. Introduction

Recent developments in the Australia-India-Japan-US Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, ‘the Quad’ included the Quad’s stated focus, articulated by its member states, viz., Australia, India, Japan and the United States, as being primarily supporting freedom of navigation in the Indo-Sino Pacific region through diplomatic representation and dialogue. These developments have been analyzed in previous research within RAUSI Dispatches, with the view to informing the issue on ‘how such a model of multilateral diplomacy might advance Canadian security interests in the Arctic region.’¹

Diagnostic analysis of that specific issue is fascinating, and it appears that predictive analysis of multilateral diplomacy itself as an instrument of state practice is equally so. This note informs the latter and in so doing, informs the former.



*Fig. 1: South China Morning Post reported on 29 April 2020 that China has added to its submarine fleet two upgraded Type 094 Jin-class nuclear submarines carrying ballistic missiles.²
Photo © Reuters*

¹ L Joseph Howard, *Quadrilateral Security Dialogue in the Asia Pacific Region and its adaptation to maritime security issues in the Arctic Region; Part III* (June 2021) <https://rausi.ca/research/research/440-quadrilateral-security-dialogue-in-the-asia-pacific-region-and-its-adaptation-to-maritime-security-issues-in-the-arctic-region-part-iii>;
Part II (May 2021) <https://rausi.ca/research/research/439-quadrilateral-security-dialogue-in-the-asia-pacific-region-and-its-adaptation-to-maritime-security-issues-in-the-arctic-region-part-ii>;
Part I (March 2021) <https://rausi.ca/research/research/438-quadrilateral-security-dialogue-in-the-asia-pacific-region-and-its-adaptation-to-maritime-security-issues-in-the-arctic-region-part-i>.

² <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3082195/chinese-navy-puts-two-new-nuclear-submarines-service>.

2. The Quad's broadening remit as one element of holistic soft-and-hard-power diplomacy

2.1 Introduction

The Quad, a platform of multilateral diplomacy, continues to mature and now invites analysis of its broader deliverables. The four member states of the Quad met in Washington 24 September 2021. The agenda included a range of nonmilitary issues, affirming 21st global security is not an exclusively force-centric paradigm. Issues included climate change, cyber security, the pandemic, 5G diversification and exchanges of students in science and technology. Supply chain issues were to be discussed, particularly those concerning semiconductors. Given their universality in use and centrality to technology, semiconductors are a strategic resource, and the security alliances of their states of origin becomes determinative in implementing national security strategy.

Concerning semiconductors and given China's stated intentions during 2021 concerning its jurisdiction over Taiwan, issues concerning Taiwan's standing and sustainability as a dependable supplier to western semi-conductor markets take on greater gravity. Accordingly, the following shows the relative importance and surrounding risk of Taiwan as a current and future source of semiconductors to western economies.

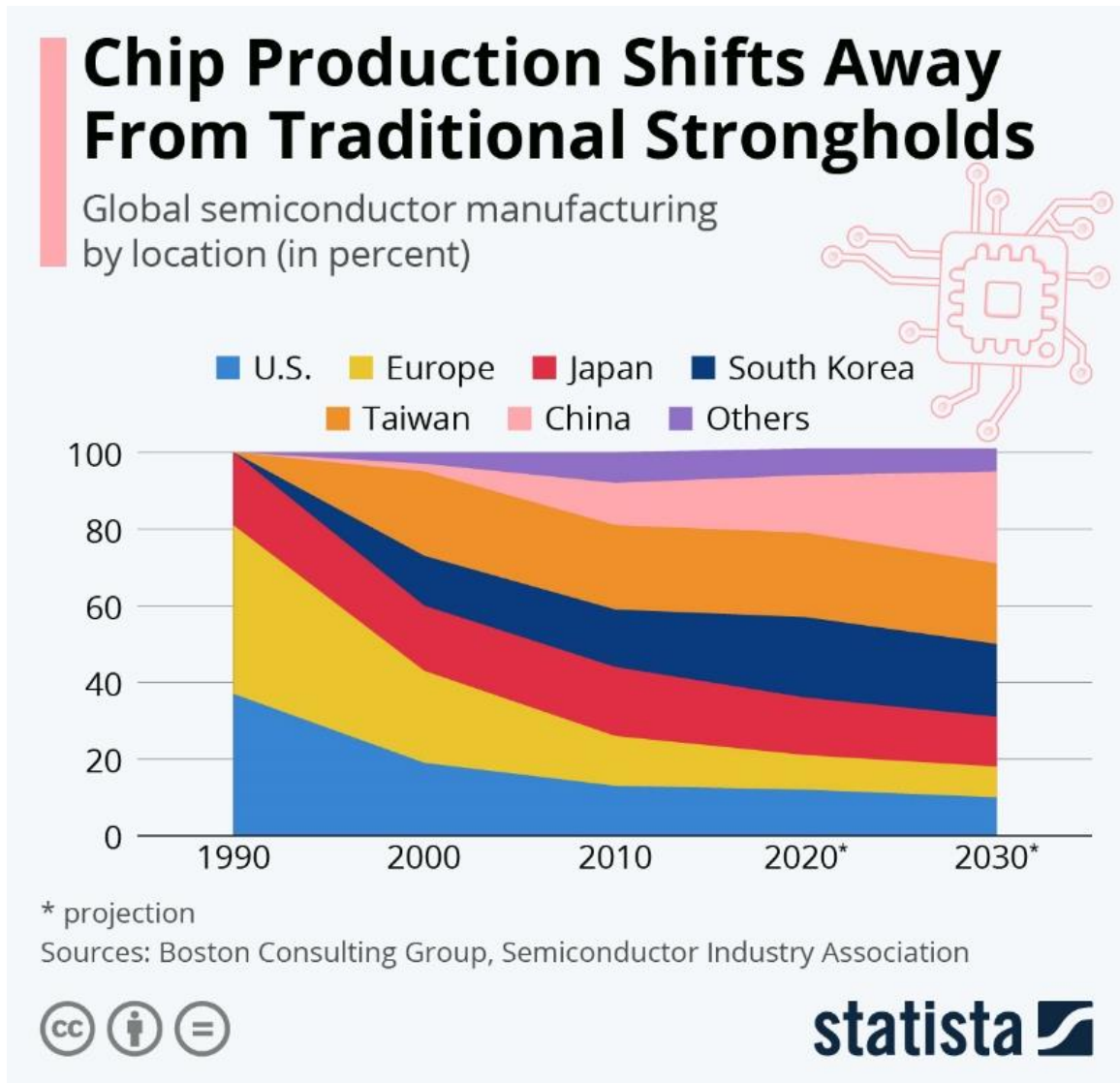


Fig. 2: Taiwan is and will remain one of the three largest sources of semi-conductors, all other things remaining equal; note all three major sources are located in Southeast Asia. © Boston Consulting Group, Semi-Conductor Industry Association

As such, the Quad is assigning greater weight to conventional trade and other diplomacies akin to those in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (concluded 16 February 2016, never ratified), (TPP).

2.2 Context

To put this development in context, the US in 2008 had initiated negotiations to join the then-extant Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement (2005) (Brunei, Chile, New Zealand and Singapore; TSEP or P4) and hence leveraged it into the formative TPP; Australia also joined the TPP. However, India remained reluctant to join the TPP while concurrently advancing the less onerous Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) with China, Australia and Member States

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue in the Asia Pacific Region and its adaptation to maritime security issues in the Arctic Region, Part IV

By LJ Howard

of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). As the US withdrew from TPP (2017) and hence the latter's termination, remaining Member States formed the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (concluded 08 March 2018 in force 30 December 2018) including Australia and Japan (CPTPP). India is not a Member State, whereas the UK intends to accede to CPTPP in 2022.

Comparatively, China was not invited to join either the TSEP, TPP or CPTTP. Following China's accession to the World Trade Organization (2001), China's increasing impact on other states' trade balances presented a disproportional influence of China in a global balance of power. To mitigate this asymmetry, the US excluded China from negotiations concerning the TPP.

2.3 Diagnostic analysis

US diplomacy chose to not negotiate with China rather than chose to negotiate, putting US-China relations in less of a longer-standing variable sum game and more in short term maneuvers. Assessing reasons for such strategy requires more time and space than this note can afford, but possibilities emerge. The US strategy might have been recognition that (1) China's comparative advantages in trade negotiations would have been superior to those of the US; (2) a US-led TPP without China might enable the US to galvanize a de facto if not de jure longstanding South East Asian security bloc favorably disposed to US security interests, notwithstanding any historical aversion within the region to longstanding security treaties and alliances; (3) exclusion of China from the TPP will force China to then seek and negotiates alternative courses of action and measures, thereby exposing its longer term strategy and diplomatic initiatives.

The third line of reasoning appears to be the most persuasive. In 2013, China initiated a series of bilateral agreements under its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (alternatively One Belt One Road (OBOR) program). BRI offers a global routing infrastructure to enable further trade volumes through and with a series of states, wherein physical infrastructure was to be constructed, with new markets then opening and trade agreements following. Critics argue such states are at risk of becoming victims of a China-modelled financial 'debt-trap' and captive markets of China. Not surprisingly, following China's 2013 presentation of its BRI strategy, the US' 2017 withdrawal followed.

In response to BRI, Japan initiated its Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP) in 2016, later formalized by the US in 2019. FOIP is a more a regional broad based support network advancing security, economics and governance than a program with hard deliverables.

Regardless, diplomatic history will show Asian states are cautious in entering treaty regimes with other states. Cooperation and customary practice are more the norm.

2.4 Conclusion

If the Quad's omnibus-styled agenda for its 24 September 2021 meeting is indicia of a more refined and substantive soft-power purpose in the immediate future, then such an arrangement requires a hard-power security arrangement to accompany it.

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue in the Asia Pacific Region and its adaptation to maritime security issues in the Arctic Region, Part IV

By LJ Howard

Such an arrangement may be found in (1) extant arrangements analyzed previously³ and centering on joint power sharing among the four Quad States in surface naval power; (2) the 15 September 2021 announcement of the trilateral security pact among Australia, the UK and the US (AUKUS), whereby the three states will develop, as Australia stated in its media release, “optimal pathway to deliver at least eight nuclear-powered submarines for Australia.”⁴ Whether they will be armed with guided missiles (see Fig. 3) or ballistic missiles (see Fig. 1), each missile platform with different ranges, following different trajectories and addressing different targets, is not immediately clear.



Fig. 3: Nuclear powered Ohio-class guided-missile USS Georgia traversing Strait of Hormuz (2020). ©Iran US, Independent 2020⁵

The UK’s participation in the AUKUS pact leverages its current deployment of a carrier strike group in the Indo-Pacific despite the UK’s not being part of the current structure of the Quad. Further,

³ Supra n 1.

⁴ Prime Minister, Minister for Defence, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Minister for Women, Media Statement (16 September 2021) <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/australia-pursue-nuclear-powered-submarines-through-new-trilateral-enhanced-security>.

⁵ US nuclear submarine transits Strait of Hormuz amid tensions (Independent via Associated Press Newswire 20 December 2020) (<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-nuclear-submarine-transits-strait-of-hormuz-amid-tensions-strait-of-hormuz-us-navy-submarine-submarine-tensions-b1777252.html>).

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue in the Asia Pacific Region and its adaptation to maritime security issues in the Arctic Region, Part IV

By LJ Howard

following Brexit, such deployment and participation enable the UK to gain a heightened profile in the international order without having to consider implications arising from membership in the European Union.

The AUKUS pact will be analyzed in future research.