Since January 2020 Elsevier has created a COVID-19 resource centre with free information in English and Mandarin on the novel coronavirus COVID-19. The COVID-19 resource centre is hosted on Elsevier Connect, the company's public news and information website.

Elsevier hereby grants permission to make all its COVID-19-related research that is available on the COVID-19 resource centre - including this research content - immediately available in PubMed Central and other publicly funded repositories, such as the WHO COVID database with rights for unrestricted research re-use and analyses in any form or by any means with acknowledgement of the original source. These permissions are granted for free by Elsevier for as long as the COVID-19 resource centre remains active.
Covid-19 and Quad’s “Soft” Reorientation

Shreya Upadhyay

Christ (Deemed to be) University, Bangalore, India

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Quadrilateral Security Dialogue comprises a group of countries— the US, Japan, Australia, and India, that started maritime collaboration in the wake of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. The initiative lasted for a brief period before falling apart in 2008. The countries re-bandied together in 2017 to consult on ensuring greater security and prosperity in a “free and open Indo-Pacific region”, and a rules-based order. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the group has been partnering on soft security aspects such as vaccine development and distribution. The paper suggests that this allows the group to become first movers in the areas of specific functional challenges. This paper looks at the role of health diplomacy in the region as a soft power tool. The theory is based on the works of Professor Joseph Nye who first coined the term ‘soft power’. It focuses on the role of India in strategic altruism to enhance Quad’s strategic influence in the region. Expanding global vaccine supply is an example of reaching out to low- and middle-income countries. The paper argues that enhancing such cooperative mechanisms will allow Quad to balance its cooperative and competitive outlook in the region, linking its security with prosperity and development objectives.

Introduction

In March 2021, the first leadership summit of Quadrilateral Security Dialogue took place. The meeting was hailed historic and first of its kind as it showed how the four member countries—the United States, Australia, Japan, and India could cooperate in creating a “free, open, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.” In the joint statement, entitled “The Spirit of Quad”, the member countries envisioned an effective vaccine distribution making it the central goal of Quad. The four countries agreed to pay for excess manufacturing capacity in India to be used to produce a billion doses of the vaccines for use in Southeast Asia. The White House media fact sheet devoted two pages to pandemic issues and half a page each to climate change and critical and emerging technology (McCarthy, 2021). Notably, Quad’s collective effort to deal with the 2004 Tsunami was an effective use of soft power. But since then, it grew into a regional vehicle with the intent of providing a counterweight to China’s growing assertiveness in Asia. However, with the recent developments, Quad seems to be is moving back to the humanitarian and collective action identity ethos taken from the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami assistance.

The paper is relevant as it looks at the framework for Quad’s pursuit of building on shared interests and addressing common challenges that could not have met better than expanding vaccine manufacturing and facilitating greater cooperation in the Indo-Pacific on vaccine supply chain and logistics. In this all the four participating countries have clear mutual foals while leaving issues of trade and defence for later stages.

The paper will briefly look at the origin of Quad after the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami and how it led to “like-minded countries in the Asia-Pacific region” come together to the themes of “mutual interest”. However, the band was short lived as the countries could not see themselves on the same page and the threats facing the region. The power is divided into three sections. The first section looks at the growing Chinese growing assertiveness in the region which has led to wariness over territory, trade, human rights issues, and alleged espionage. Chinese smart power in the name of Belt and Road initiative and Health Road Initiative has led to Beijing asserting its regional leadership and influence. The next section focuses on Chinese vaccine diplomacy as a charm offensive and a means of damage control for its worldwide falling reputation and worsening cross-country ties over the allegations of China ‘creating’ the pandemic. However, Beijing’s diplomacy has been termed “conditional” to advance its regional agenda, particularly on sensitive issues such as its claims in the South China Sea. The third section analyses Joseph Nye’s theory of soft power being used by the Quad’s health diplomacy initiative. It looks at the attempts at institutionalizing the band on a soft security framework, especially during the pandemic. The new found soft power aims to deal with the pandemic while countering Chinese dominance in the region. The section argues...
that India is a vital link in this endeavor. The highly visible partnership under Quad enhances India’s global visibility as a vaccine manufacturer and provides a chance to demonstrate India’s growing interest in being an important player in the life sciences research and innovation panorama. The concluding section brings out how Quad is a “force for good” in the region which resists the idea of vaccine nationalism that will lead to inequality at country, region and demographic level. The operational partnerships created during this endeavor can then be expanded into other collaborations, helping to bring Indo and the Pacific parts of the Indo-Pacific closer together. As the Quad’s origins in the Tsunami Core Group indicate, the provision of public goods is written into the group’s DNA. The soft power of QUAD has gained traction at the leadership level. It will help in fighting vaccine nationalism and promoting the group as part of a pluralistic foreign policy approach to the emerging Indo-Pacific construct.

Origin of Quad

The 2004 disaster brought the four Indo-Pacific democracies together in a soft security understanding for humanitarian/disaster assistance collaboration. This was hailed as “a new style of diplomacy” (Prakash, 2020). This Tsunami Core group disbanded once the disaster assistance was complete, but the template had established a successful track record as a vehicle for addressing issues of regional concern (Buchan et al., 2020). The idea that germinated prompted members to move on to traditional security cooperation based on shared geopolitical interests and threat perceptions. In 2006, Japan launched the idea of a “sweeping arc of a freedom and prosperity” (Ambrigo, 2021), to encompass a host of countries embracing the principles of freedom, democracy, a market economy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. On a visit to Tokyo, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced in a joint statement that both countries were eager to begin a dialogue with other “like-minded countries in the Asia-Pacific region” to address themes of “mutual interest” (Buchan et al., 2020). The following year, in a speech before the Indian parliament in August, Abe spoke about the “confluence of the two seas”, a concept meant to serve as the basis for a broader Asia evolving into an open and transparent network spanning the entirety of the Pacific Ocean, including the US and Australia, and allowing people, goods, capital, and knowledge to circulate freely (Ambrigo, 2021). After that the four Quad navies along with Singapore took part in the enlarged version of the already existing India-US Malabar series of military exercises (between India and the United States since 1992) in the Bay of Bengal. The maneuvers featured exchanges of personnel and drills in sea control, anti-submarine warfare, and multi-carrier operations, among other skills.

This led to Beijing denouncing Quad as an attempt on the part of these members to encircle China and filed official demarches with each of the four countries (Varadarajan, 2007). The group, however, chose to call itself “informal” (Buchan et al., 2020) touching on areas of common interest to the dialogue partners, including disaster relief. The lack of specificity about the Quad’s purpose and objectives gave critics room to seize on the most radical speculation: that the Quad would soon turn into an “Asian NATO” (Madan, 2017) or otherwise evolve into a security alliance. The effort soon dissipated amidst member leadership transitions, concern about economic repercussions from China, and attention to other national interests. For China, Quad represented and still continues to represent a “Cold War” mentality (Economic Times, 2021). Beijing continued to accept the old Asia Pacific construct rather than subscribing to the new Indo-Pacific nomenclature (Jain, 2021). Both Australia and India became reticent in their approaches. Australian Defence Minister Brendan Nelson expressed on a July 2007 visit to Delhi that Australia preferred to restrict the Quad to issues of trade and culture (Chellaney, 2007a; Chellaney, 2007b), while Prime Minister Manmohan Singh emphasized that the Quad held “no security implication” (Chellaney, 2007a; Chellaney, 2007b). This showed that the four countries were not on the same page on Quad and the threats facing the region (Buchan et al., 2020). Quad lasted from mid-2006 to early 2008 before falling apart with a whimper.

China’s smart power and the resurgence of Quad

In 2017, efforts renewed with Quad 2.0. The ten year hiatus had given time for ties among the four nations to mature. Along with that the strategic balance in Asia had become more uncertain. Each member of the Quad has become increasingly wary of Beijing in recent years amid disputes over territory, trade, human rights issues, and alleged espionage. There has been a near global consensus that the People’s Republic of China is extending its influence in the Indo-Pacific Region—politically, economically, socially and militarily. China’s behaviour lends credence to the concept that increasing relative power is accompanied by an increasing desire to satisfy own national interest in absolute terms (Klien, 2020).

Chinese Premier Xi Jinping’s dream project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has been cultivating economic, infrastructural, digital and health connections with countries in Eurasia. The BRI has served as a strategic smart power instrument in Chinese foreign policy aiming at achieving Sinocentric regional connectivity. In a testimony before the U. S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, it was stated that the BRI will likely result in increased overseas access and presence for the People’s Liberation Army. It is both a blue print and test bed for Sinocentric world order (US China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2020). Taking over of Hambantota port in Sri Lanka alarmed policymakers who suspect that China has gained a strategic foothold in the Indian Ocean along an important commercial and military waterway. Experts have pointed out that negative externalities will develop from BRI if recipient countries are subject to corruption and coercion, or caught in debt traps that China exploits for political and strategic ends. Beijing’s potential inducements and perceptions will lead countries to become less assertive to push back against Chinese assertiveness (Ratner, 2018). Chinese debt-trap diplomacy involves offering cheap loans for transformative infrastructure projects, which involve a substantial investment in low or middle-income countries. In several cases, these projects are not economically viable. Countries are unable to keep up with the repayments and Beijing gets a chance to demand concessions or advantages in exchange for debt relief. Some of the other examples in this regard are the Mombasa port in Kenya, or the debt ridden Chinese-Pakistan Economic Corridor. On the geo-economic side, China is using the BRI to assert its regional leadership through a vast program of economic integration. It aims to create a regional production chain, within which China would be a center of advanced manufacturing and innovation and the standard setter.

China’s smart power has been seen in its investment in the global health diplomacy. Health diplomacy has remained an important foreign policy aspect of China to expand its geopolitical influence around the world. The Chinese leadership had been promoting the Health Silk Road even prior to the Covid-19, as an extension of the Belt and Road Initiative. China’s engagement with global health began in the 1960s when the government dispatched medical teams to Africa. By 2015, China had emerged as an important participant in global health, serving as an essential source of overseas development assistance (ODA) and development assistance for health (DAH), sharing concerns about cross-border infectious disease threats, joining in global health governance, and participating in global sharing of knowledge and technology (Tang et al., 2017). The aim for Beijing was to be perceived a responsible great power. China has been forging the Health Silk Road initiative with countries from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Africa (FOCAC), Central and Eastern Europe (17 + 1), the Arab League, etc. The countries under the leadership of China have cooperated for hospitals, health industry, access to markets, combating infectious diseases like MERS and SARS (Rudolf, 2021). Between 2012 and 2014, China launched an unprecedented response to the Ebola epidemic in
West Africa mobilizing military cadres, including doctors, public health experts, and military medical officers, to West Africa.

In the wake of Covid-19, China doubled down its efforts to cast itself as a responsible global health leader, launching a public health campaign under the moniker of Health Silk Road (Rudolf, 2021). The Chinese government provided medical aid and consultation on a bilateral basis to nations such as Malaysia, the Philippines, Greece, etc. Medical supplies were also provided by companies such as Huawei or China Communications Construction Company. The Jack Ma and Alibaba Foundations have delivered relief packages to dozens of countries ranging from Uganda and Ukraine to the United States. China has also lent economic support to some afflicted countries, including a $500 million dollar concessionary loan to Sri Lanka (Lancaster, Rubin, & Rapp-Hooper, 2021). China delved deeply in ‘mask diplomacy’ providing the world with masks and medical kits. Majority Muslim countries (such as Afghanistan, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan) received masks from Xinjiang Autonomous Region. In Southeast Asia (e.g. Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar), soldiers from the People’s Liberation Army delivered medical aid supplies (Rudolf, 2021). China even offered aid supplies to states that do not (yet) have diplomatic relations with Beijing, especially in Latin America. In Paraguay the parliamentary opposition demanded that relations with Taiwan be broken off so as to receive aid from Beijing. Belize received donations of auxiliary materials from Chinese organisations that were supposedly NGOs (Rudolf, 2021).

China initiated vaccine research as early as January 2020. Vaccine development teams featured public–private partnerships that combined state research institutions’ resources and pharmaceutical companies’ manufacturing capabilities. China also initiated vaccine trials in Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. China categorizes its vaccines as “public goods” and has promised priority access to ASEAN and African countries and provided vaccine aid to developing countries. For example, in Asia, China donated 1 million doses to Cambodia and 300,000 to Myanmar and Laos, as well as batches to Brunei and Nepal, among other countries. In Africa, China has donated doses to Equatorial Guinea, Congo, and Sierra Leone, among others. In the Middle East, it has donated small amounts of vaccines to Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria (Yang, 2021). Along with that China is also on the road of using Digital Silk Road to monitor contact tracing and quarantine enforcement. This is being done with the intent that it will help other countries to monitor quarantines and sort populations that will help in safely restart local economies (Lancaster et al., 2021). China has a global ambition to provide vaccines to developing countries across regions as it aspires to become an economic and technology giant with unrivaled R&D as well as manufacturing capabilities. This soft power tool will also allow China to redeem its national reputation on the international stage.

Notably, Chinese influence has been on a rise within the international organisations such as the WHO. This backed up with Trump administration’s move of withdrawing from the global leadership position created a geopolitical vacuum, and economic slump, where Beijing could position itself, highlight the shortcomings of democracies, and position itself as a global health leader (Gauttam, Singh, & Kaur, 2020). However, China’s vaccine diplomacy has been criticized for being “conditional”, and to wield geopolitical influence. In a paper published by Singapore-based Yusof Ishak Institute, it was stated that China’s “vaccine diplomacy” is not unconditional, and Beijing may use its vaccine donations to advance its regional agenda, particularly on sensitive issues such as its claims in the South China Sea (Veremias and Radtio, 2020).

While it was the US President Donald Trump’s confrontational policy with Beijing that led to the second incarnation of Quad during a gathering in Manila focused on “issues of common interest in the Indo-Pacific region”. Between 2017 and 2020, Quad was engaged in labored, slow paced discussions. No common joint statements were issued when Quad 2.0 returned. In the next three years, the intra-Quad dialogues, however, upgraded to the ministerial level and since 2021 to the head-of-government imprimitur level, according it credibility (Walker, 2021). In particular, India and Japan emerged as the critical components of two different trilateral relationships, one involving Japan, India, and the United States (which first met in 2011 at the assistant secretary level and presently occurs at the ministerial level) and another involving Japan, India, and Australia (first occurring in 2015 at the vice-ministerial level) (Prakash, 2021). These arrangements illustrated the growing alignment of the Quad countries—connectivity, sustainable development, counter-terrorism, non-proliferation and maritime and cybersecurity, with a view to promoting peace, stability and prosperity in an increasingly inter-connected Indo-Pacific region (Panda, 2020). Quad 2.0 has seen an attempt to institutionalise the grouping built on a soft security framework drawn on political, economic and ideological communality. According to Nishida, and Panda (2021) such a framework must have a non-military connotation even though it would imbibe some maritime security features. The Quad is a political process, tied to immense soft and hard security objectives. Therefore, before (or alongside) exercising its military-economic muscles, the Quad must initiate deeper cultural and ideological diplomacy tracks to build political synergy that could eventually translate to a tighter security, and eventually a military, arrangement in the Indo-Pacific. The idea is to have political, economic, strategic, and ideological maneuvering among Quad members, who have had a clear divide in their China policies, but continue to share strong economic or multilateral interactions with Beijing. Therefore, the Quad needs to create multi-layered networks among educational institutions, promote think tank forums, build scholarships or fellowship opportunities that promote ideological exchanges. Ultimately, the aim must be to build and sustain a stronger Indo-Pacific intellectual chorus challenging authoritarian and unilateral ideals and initiatives.

India the ‘soft power’ link in Quad

The concept of soft power was first promoted by Joseph Nye as being the capacity “to persuade and influence without coercion”. The ingredients of soft power include governance, societal values, education, technology, and wealth (when employed non-coercively). Because these ingredients are integral to national reputation they can achieve outcomes purely by example. Soft power qualities such as education and medical skill also can be deployed as policy tools. As instruments of soft power and nation branding, vaccines can help foster a favorable country image and likeability. Vaccine diplomacy is an appealing instrument for projecting soft power, or power of co-option, what Joseph Nye described as “the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment” (Nye, 2008).

The Covid-19 pandemic ensured that the Quad orients its agenda towards the management of the health crisis and planning on economic recovery. Virtual meetings during the pandemic has also included countries like Brazil and Israel, signifying the sheer breadth of the framework’s aims. Quad’s leadership summit stressed on how Quad was “going to be vital arena for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, an important pillar of stability in the region and a force for global good” (Bochkov, 2021). On the economic front, the virus has exposed the impact of over dependence on supply chains emanating from China and accelerated collective thinking and planning on how to diversify supply chains for strategic and critical sectors. Quad countries, therefore, collectively aim to bolster a new order that can hold Beijing to account. The October 2020 ministerial meeting had speculated rallying against Chinese “exploitation, corruption and coercion” (Bochkov, 2021). The vaccine diplomatic initiative is also aimed at countering Chinese dominance in the Indo-Pacific region. US President Joe Biden’s first major foreign policy initiative focused substantially on vaccine diplomacy, an area where China has already established a lead. There is an acute “labor division” among the group in the Quad Vaccine Partnership to supply up to one billion vaccines across the Indo-Pacific by the end of 2022. The US and Japan plan to fund Indian production of Johnson and Johnson’s single-dose vaccine, which Australia will then distribute across
Southeast Asia. India, Hyderabad-based drug maker Biological E will make 1 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines, including the one developed by Johnson & Johnson, by 2022 under the Quad commitment. The US will help Biological E expand its COVID-19 vaccine output capacity, while Tokyo is in talks to provide concessional loans to India to expand production of vaccines for export. Australia will assist in vaccine supply, while focusing on last-mile delivery support in Southeast Asia.

India has been seen as a vital link in the Indo-Pacific strategy. It’s geographic and geopolitical centrality in Indo-Pacific provides a counterbalance to China’s growing presence in the Indian Ocean. However, for long India was dubbed a ‘weak link’ in the Quad, because of its ambivalence regarding the grouping being seen as a military alliance targeting China. For India, the Indo-Pacific conception is not based on a grouping aimed at a particular country and in fact views it as promotion of principles for regional governance. India has sought to frame the Quad in the most inclusive, least confrontational terms. India’s initial role in Quad 2.0 was also seen to be reticent. New Delhi for long resisted efforts to elevate the Malabar naval exercise to a quadrilateral affair. However, the year 2021 has seen India becoming more deeply involved with Quad. India has championed the idea of building a global response to fight the pandemic. Famously called the “pharmacy of the world”, India’s role as a supplier of drugs assumed a great significance at a time of the pandemic. The Indian pharma ramped up trials and production of drugs. US-based Gilead Sciences has entered into agreements with at least 6 Indian pharmaceutical companies to manufacture Remdesivir for distribution in 127 countries (Sandhu, 2021). India supplied large quantities of HCQ to a large part of the world. India also provided technical assistance to countries requiring rapid response teams of doctors, nurses and paramedics. India evacuated and repatriated over 60,000 foreign nationals from more than 70 countries who were stuck in India due to the pandemic. Despite being a lower middle country, India has pledged to deliver 240 million doses in the first half of 2021. It has spent considerable resources on bilateral deals and donations (Yang, 2021). India is supplying tens of thousands of doses to Bhutan, Maldives, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, and Seychelles, and many times more to countries like Brazil.

Just as the WHO declared the contagion as pandemic, India independently organized several virtual summits—the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) web conference (15 March 2020) and the “Extraordinary Virtual G20 Leaders’ Summit” (26 March 2020), and later in April, interactions with foreign ministers of BRICS nations (Jash, 2021). India offered US$10 million for a voluntary Emergency Fund to be used by the SAARC nations in case of a scarcity of essentials (Mann and Anant, 2020) Additionally, India’s Armed Forces have been actively engaged in carrying forward India’s mission abroad. In February 2020, an Indian Air Force (IAF) relief aircraft evacuated 76 Indians and 36 foreign nationals from Wuhan. In cooperation with the Indian Army, the IAF launched the 18-hour Operation Sanjeevani to deliver 6.2 tons of essential medicines and hospital consumables to the Maldives, and the Indian Navy’s warship INS Khatri (5,600-ton landing ship) deployed under Mission Sagar, carrying medical teams, consignments of essential medicines, and food supplies to Maldives, Mauritius, Madagascar, Comoros, and Seychelles (Jash, 2021). India has been providing technical assistance in the form of dispatching Rapid Response Teams to countries like Kuwait and the Maldives, and has set up platforms to exchange information. Apart from that various training programmes for healthcare professionals have also been organized (Mann and Anant, 2020). At the last minute, India last year stepped up engagement with African countries in not only trade but also health diplomacy. India has been ramping up its diplomatic initiatives during the pandemic. Almost 20% of India’s pharmaceutical exports, valued at US$ 17 billion, are to Africa. Southern and Western regions of Africa are the largest importers of Indian medicines. These include antiretroviral (ARV) drugs that cost only a fraction of those produced by Western companies. India has also been involved in capacity building and collaboration in the health sector, especially tele-medicine, etc. For analysts, India’s attempt is to counter China’s wolf warrior diplomacy by providing vaccines to more than 71 countries. After the troops of both countries disengaged from their borders after a dangerous stand-off last year, their rivalry has now shifted to vaccine diplomacy (Prakash, 2021). More than 60 per cent of China’s global vaccine supply has been directed to South east Asia in an attempt to employ the soft power strategy to soften stand on territorial disputes in the region (Sengupta, 2021a; Sengupta, 2021b). While 80.75 lakh doses have been sent as gift, free of charge, 165.24 lakh doses have been delivered as part of Covax mechanism under the aegis of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation. An estimated 339.67 lakh doses have been sent as part of commercial deals. Just under a fifth of the entire stock of New Delhi’s Vaccine Maitri, 90 lakh doses, has gone to Bangladesh, the top recipient among the neighbours. Pakistan will get vaccines made in India through Covax. India has supplied vaccines to at least 50% of the Least Developed (LDC) countries and one third of the Small Island Developing (SID) countries (Roy, 2021).

India, Australia and Japan also launched the “Supply Chain Resilience Initiative,” which in effect is aimed at reducing global manufacturing’s dependence on China. The combination of Quad states’ efforts on the “critical technologies of the future” is a way to counterbalance China’s ambitious US$1.4 trillion plan to be the king of the global cutting-edge technology. The Quad has also recognized the huge potential of technology by stressing the importance of “strengthening supply chains for semiconductors” and cooperation on procuring rare-earth minerals. The Quad countries are presently placing a huge emphasis on the joint development of fifth-generation telecommunications (5G) and other advanced technologies. The US, Japan and Australia have officially banned Huawei and ZTE from government procurement of 5G equipment, with India tooing a cautious line during the recent border clash by opting to pressure local telecom service providers on a ministerial level. India in the last few months has chosen to project its role as a supplier of goods and services most needed around the world, like masks and vaccines (Sengupta, 2021a; Sengupta, 2021b). After the meeting in March 2021, the Quad leaders’ joint statement observed how China continued to carry out grey-zone coercion in South and East China Seas in the times of the pandemic, and in South Asia, it has clashed with India along the Line of Actual Control. The Quad is upping its soft power agenda by taking a broad spectrum of initiatives targeting climate change, heath security and tech standards.

Conclusion

The Quad exercise is an attempt to show the world that it is the force of for good in the region, while giving the four countries a chance to work together over an extended period, identifying areas to shore up, and building interoperability and trust (Pascal, 2021). Each QUAD member has its own strengths to exercise as seen in the Covid-19 duration. India has the low cost medical prowess. It has become the pivot for the collaboration to achieve expanded manufacturing of vaccines, prioritizing increased capacity for their exports. Japan has built hospital and medical clinics, and is providing concessional loans for India to expand vaccine manufacturing. Australia and the US are funding the production and delivery of vaccines in Asia, also ensuring ‘last mile’ delivery support.

The vaccine diplomacy of Quad will also work on coordination and sharing of data among the national regulatory bodies for pharmaceuticals and biotechnology across the Indo-Pacific. It will also work in the area of creating regulatory best practices (Feigenbaum & Schwemlein, 2021). Quad could seek partners to help expand and accelerate vaccine production by broadening the pool of licensed private producers, as the United States did by using the Defense Production Act to enable collaboration between Merck and Johnson & Johnson. India has a special role to play here because it has an indigenous vaccine, Covaxin, and substantial domestic manufacturing capacity through Bharat Biotech and the Serum Institute (Feigenbaum & Schwemlein, 2021). Quad’s...
'force for good' resists the idea of vaccine nationalism which will lead to inequality at country, region and demographic level. The vaccine diplomacy will further build up operational relationships with points of contact in each of the countries in the Indo-Pacific network that would be invaluable if countries are later hit by sudden humanitarian crises, such as a cyclone or earthquake (Pascal, 2021). It is a sure shot way in the pandemic world to earn global influence. It requires follow ups and maintaining relationships built up in the initial phase. Those pathways could then be expanded into other collaborations, helping to bring Indo and the Pacific parts of the Indo-Pacific closer together in a very real way. A Quad exercise to deliver Indian vaccines to Oceania could be a game changer for more than just the people of the region-it would build the relationships within the Quad, and between the Quad and the region, that will be urgently needed in times to come (Pascal, 2021).

The Centre for Strategic and International Studies conducted a survey in 2020 which it asked researchers, and academicians from the QUAD countries regarding the grouping undertaking a coordinating role in regional economic and developmental assistance, including loans, technical development, and human rights promotion throughout the Indo-Pacific (Buchan et al., 2020). The respondents preferred a "softer" role for QUAD in coordinating economic development and human rights promotion policies in the Indo-Pacific. Quad members already cooperate on joint infrastructure development projects in the Indo-Pacific region, such as a recently announced initiative among Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and the United States to build out the electrical grid on Papua New Guinea. In the past, Quad focused exclusively on security issues through different military exercises involving planning and interoperability. But a disproportionate focus on security issues has also limited the Quad’s growth potential. When the Trump administration re-vitalized Quad in 2017, the group continued to suffer from lack of purpose and definition. However, pandemic times have given a new role to Quad. As the Quad’s origins in the Tsunami Core Group indicate, the provision of public goods is written into the group’s DNA. The soft power of Quad has gained traction at the leadership level. The 2004 version of Quad, had no standing secretariat, no joint communiques, no fixed schedules, no mandate or sweeping statements. It took function and not form as its guide. Its goal was defined, reflected clear metrics for success, and no mandate or sweeping statements. It took function and not form as its guide. Its goal was defined, reflected clear metrics for success, and involved meaningful activities such as sharing operational information and conducting relief operations. When the mission was accomplished, the problem was solved, and this functional purpose was met, the successful group simply disbanded (Feigenbaum & Schwelmien, 2021). The idea today is not to disband Quad but use soft power to institutionalise it. The Quad could function as first movers and pathfinders on other important issues where other regional players are reluctant or incapable to take the lead. Some of these include, joint responses to the coronavirus pandemic, climate change, and other challenges, such as countering disinformation, intelligence sharing, advancing counterterrorism, joint operations on transnational terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group, and Pakistan-based groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad (White, 2021), assuring maritime security, information exchanges regarding green technology, technical developments, human rights promotions, making supply chains more diverse, etc.

The combination of Quad’s efforts on the critical technologies of the future is a way to ensure that Beijing does not dominate the global cutting-edge technology in the areas of quantum computing, machine learning, space exploration, etc. In terms of hard power dynamics of Quad, the US has stressed that Quad is not a military alliance which has helped India to come on board. On the other hand Quad continues to remain a “security dialogue” which brings in the hard power aspect of maritime security. Quad is therefore emerging as a combination of soft power and hard power with talks on tech, health and technology on one hand combined with naval assets capability on the other with the potential to build into something bigger. It is the juggling of hard power and soft power that the Quad has emerged into what Nye calls as “smart power” – a combination of military with association and alliances. Quad therefore is open to the idea of other partners. Quad Meetings during 2020 were held to discuss Covid-19, and included additional Indo-Pacific powers: New Zealand, South Korea and Vietnam to exchange best notes and practices. Other issues that have been discussed are sharing of technologies, getting the global economy back on track, investing in education in the region, etc. Growing concerns regarding a changing world order, strategic consequences of China’s rise, economy, public health has led to countries warming up to the idea of Indo-Pacific and creating partnerships in the process. Quad’s joint fight with Covid-19 has led to a slow but steady institutionalisation of the Quad. This further paves the road for possible future expansion, and mini-lateral cooperation among like-minded countries, and creation of a resilient, rules-based, free, open, and inclusive maritime domain in the region.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

References

Ambrigo, Enrico (Mar. 2021). The Quad: An emerging multilateral security framework of democracies in the Indo-Pacific region. European Parliament. European Parliamentary Research Service.

Buchan, Patrick, and Beacham Rimland. (Mar. 2020). Defining the Diamond: The Past, Present, and Future of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. Centre for Strategic and International Studies . no. 4, Informa UK Limited, pp. 223–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/0163668209450782.

Bochkov, Danil (2021). Will the Indo-Pacific become the new battleground for US- and China-led alliances? South China Morning Post. In press.

Chellaney, Brahma. (19 July 2007). ‘Quad Initiative’: An Inhormonous Concert of Democracies | The Japan Times. The Japan Times. https://www.thejapantimes.co.jp/opinion/2007/07/19/commentary/quad-initiative-an-inhormonous-concert-of-democracies/.

Chellaney, Brahma. (18 July 2021). Leader Article: This Quartet Has A Future - Times of India. The Times of India. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/edit-page/leader-article-this-quartet-has-a-future/articleshow/2212192.cms.

Economic Times. (25 March 2021). China says it firmly opposes Quad alliance as it adheres to Cold War mentality. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/china-says-it-firmly-opposes-quad-alliance-as-it-adheres-to-cold-war-mentality/articleshow/81692933.cms?from--mdr-.

Feigenbaum, Evan, & Schwelmien, James (2021). How Biden Can Make the Quad Endure. Carnegie Endowment For International Peace. In press.

Gautgam, Priya, Singh, Bawa, & Kaur, Jaspal (2020). COVID-19 and Chinese Global Health Diplomacy: Geopolitical Opportunity for China’s Hegemony? Millennium Asia. In press.

Jash, Amrita (2021). The Quad Factor in the Indo-Pacific and the Role of India. J. Indo-Pacific Affairs, 04(02), 78–85. Spring 2021. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3480709.

Klein, Frederick (2020). Why Quasi-Alliances will persist in the Indo-Pacific? The fall and rise of the Quad. J. Asian Secur. Int. Affairs, 7(3), 271–304. https://doi.org/10.1177/23477902092629.

Madan, Tanvi. (16 Nov. 2017). The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth Of The ‘Quad’. War on the Rocks.

Mann, Harsh V. Pant & Anant Singh (13 June 2020). India’s Public Health Diplomacy in the Time of COVID19 | ORF. ORF, https://www.facebook.com/ORBOnline/.

McCarthy, John. (2021). The Quad’s Waging A Soft-Power Battle For Asian Hearts And Minds. Financial Review. In press.

McCarthy, John. (2021). The Quad’s Waging a Soft-Power Battle For Asian Hearts And Minds. Financial Review. in a Changing World. https://www.financialreview.com.au/foreign-affairs/the-quad-s-waging-a-soft-power-battle-for-asian-hearts-and-minds-20210315-p57a20/.

Nishida, Ippeita and Jagannath Panda. (2021). India and the ‘Quad Plus Initiative’- An Inharmonious Concert of Democracies | The Japan Times. The Japan Times. https://https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/internationa l/world-news/china-says-it-firmly-opposes-quad-alliance-as-it-adheres-to-cold-war-mentality/articleshow/81692933.cms?from--mdr-.

Pascall, Cleo. (6 Feb. 2021). India’s Vaccine Diplomacy A Shot in the Arm for the Quad? Sunday Guardian.

Prakash, Arun. (24 Oct. 2020). Time Has Come for an Indo-Pacific Concord of Regional Democracies with a Maritime Security Charter | The Indian Express. “The Indian Express”, https://www.indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/quad-malabar-navy-exercise-china-india-6854350/.

S. Upadhyay
Prakash, Teesta. (16 Mar. 2021). *The Quad Gives a Boost to India’s Vaccine Diplomacy | The Interpreter*. Lowy Institute, The Interpreter. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/quad-gives-boost-indias-vaccine-diplomacy>.

Ratner, Ely (2018). Geostategic and Military Drivers and Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative. *Council on Foreign Relations*. In press.

Roy, Shubhajit. (Mar. 2021). 71 Countries, 58 Million Doses, India’s Vaccine Diplomacy Gets Quad Booster | India News, The Indian Express. *The Indian Express*, 14, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/indias-covid-vaccine-diplomacy-quad-summit-7227345/>.

Rudolf, Moritz (2021). China’s Health Diplomacy during Covid-19. *SWP*. In press.

Sengupta, Hindol. (21 Mar. 2021). *What Connects India’s Vaccine Diplomacy and the Quad?*. Fortune India: Business News, Strategy, Finance and Corporate Insight, Fortune India, <https://www.fortuneindia.com/polemicist/what-connects-indias-vaccine-diplomacy-and-the-quad/105320>.

Sengupta, Hindol. (24 Jan. 2021). *The Importance of India’s Health Diplomacy*. Fortune India: Business News, Strategy, Finance and Corporate Insight, Fortune India, <https://www.fortuneindia.com/polemicist/the-importance-of-indias-health-diplomacy/105072>.

Sandhu, Gurpreet (2021). India’s Health Diplomacy During A Global Pandemic And The Future Of Pharma. *BW Business World*. In press.

Tang, Kun, Li, Zhihui, Li, Wenkai, & Chen, Lincoln (2017). China’s silk road and global health. *The Lancet*, Dec., 390(10112), 2595–2601. <https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(17)32898-2>

US China Economic and Security Review Commission (2020). *2020 Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission: Executive Summary and Recommendations*. <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/2020_Executive_Summary.pdf>.

Varadarajan, Siddharth. (14 June 2007). *Four-Power Meeting Drew Chinese Demarche*. Siddharth Varadarajan, <https://www.facebook.com/WordPresscom>, <https://svaradarajan.com/2007/06/14/four-power-meeting-drew-chinese-demarche/>.

Walker, Tony. (15 Mar. 2021). *Quad’s Covid-19 Vaccine Diplomacy Flexes Its Potential to Counter China’s Rising Soft Power*. Scroll.In <https://scroll.in/article/989487/the-quad-has-made-a-good-start-with-vaccine-diplomacy-now-it-should-avoid-the-china-trap>.

White, Joshua (Jan. 2021). *After The Foundational Agreements: An Agenda For Us-India Defense And Security Cooperation*. Brookings, brookings.edu.

Yang, Shiming (2021). In *Rising-Power Competition The Covid-19 Vaccine Diplomacy of China and India* (pp. 531–532). Palgrave Macmillan UK: The National Bureau of Asian Research. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-95810-8_854>.

Yeremia, Ardhitya, & Raditio, Klaus Heinrich (2020). In *Minding the Grassroots*. ISEAS Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789814951159-003>.