

The Quadrilateral
Conundrum: Can
ASEAN Be Persuad-
ed?
Page 2-3

RSIS Seminar Series
on Multilateralism
Studies: "Brexit: The
Disintegration of Eu-
rope"
Page 4

"Constructing Images
of China: Signalling,
Perception, and Cred-
ibility"
Page 4

Upcoming Event:
"Trade War Threat:
RSIS to Host High-
Level Meeting"
Page 5

Selected Publications
Page 5

Editorial Team

Amalina Anuar

Amanda Huan

Quo Vadis, Quad?



From left, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono, Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Julie Bishop and Secretary of State Michael R Pompeo at a Trilateral Strategic Dialogue in August 2018. Photo taken from the US Department of State Official Flickr account and tagged under the public domain.

Contradictions and Conundrums

FEATURED COMMENTARY

The Quadrilateral Conundrum: Can ASEAN Be Persuaded?

By Joel Ng



US Secretary of State Michael R Pompeo speaking at the 51st ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting. Photo courtesy of the US Department of State Flickr account and tagged under the public domain.

If the Quad cannot make clear how it addresses three inherent contradictions in its revival of the 'Indo-Pacific', it will not achieve the support of ASEAN states.

Commentary

THE REVIVAL of the 'Indo-Pacific' as a geostrategic region for the United States was perhaps less surprising than the revival of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, better known as the 'Quad', with Australia, India, Japan, and the US negotiating to restart the forum on the sidelines of the 2017 ASEAN Summit. The first Quad collapsed when China expressed opposition, and despite protestations that it was not a Chinese containment strategy, Australia dropped out.

The success of a revived Quad will depend on two issues: Firstly, that it is not

a purely strategic or security policy, as this could only be interpreted by China as confrontational. This will require a greater economic component, because China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has a long head-start and colossal resources at its disposal. Secondly, it must secure buy-in from ASEAN states, who need reassurance that the public goods on offer from the Quad are in their interests. It is only with these two in place that it can assure China that it is not a new containment strategy, and the ASEAN states in the middle of the Indo-Pacific are at the heart of the project.

Three Contradictions and a Conundrum

However, for ASEAN to accept it, the Quad needs to provide greater clarity. Three contradictions underpin ASEAN's difficulties

with the Quad's revival of the 'Indo-Pacific' concept. The questions are on ASEAN's centrality, the tussle with China, and the degree of commitment likely from the Quad. Making clear how they will navigate these challenges will be necessary to assuage ASEAN concerns about their motivations.

The first contradiction is that ASEAN lies at the heart of this project, but is not the initiator. The US and Australia have asserted that ASEAN is at the centre of the Indo-Pacific, and a free and open Indo-Pacific would be impossible without it. This is a truism but does not answer ASEAN questions. For instance, there are no ASEAN states seated at the front table of the Quad.

The absence of Indonesia, a major democracy in the heart of the "Indo-Pacific"

raises questions: Why isn't it a Quintet? Is one of the major democracies in the heart of the region either omitted or reticent? Whatever the answer, it speaks to misgivings about the Quad that will need to be overcome with more than rhetoric.

The inherent tension is that ASEAN members firmly believe their centrality is vital to security, and this centrality is not merely geographic. "Centrality" for ASEAN means securing their consultation and assent as managing the diversity of ASEAN states and interests is best done through regional fora that ASEAN has constructed.

The Quad's present structure bypasses what ASEAN considers its crucial mechanism that balances contending interests. It is as crucial that

Continued on Page 3

China plays a part in ASEAN's fora as Quad members, even if the result does not always suit an earnestly proactive state.

Rules-Based Order or Stepping on China's Toes?

The second contradiction relates to the idea of a "free and open Indo-Pacific" at the heart of the Quad's common interests and strategy. This rules-based order sought by the Quad aligns well with ASEAN, which maintains the need for the rule of law in the settling of differences in the international arena. ASEAN states agree with this in principle.

In practice, however, the Quad's interpretation steps on China's toes, particularly over its claims in the South China Sea. This is something ASEAN does not want to have to take sides on. Whose rules or which rules-based order is ASEAN to follow?

If the Quad seeks to assertively require members to conform to the rules-based order or suffer penalties, ASEAN is unlikely to be enthusiastic. ASEAN has already had this debate internally before, over the nature of the legality and mechanisms of its own Charter. ASEAN opted then

to choose a softer, slower approach, for all the difficulties it would entail regarding its economic integration goals.

A rules-based order that is a Trojan Horse for the concession of sovereignty is always a possible interpretation when ASEAN is not involved, particularly when proposed by major powers on its periphery.

Furthermore, Australia, growing economically closer with China, may face a commitment question if it too brings its rule of law rhetoric into confrontation with China. ASEAN is well aware that the last time round, then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd blinked first, Australia withdrew, and the first Quad collapsed. Agreeing in principle with the idea, and implementing it, are different questions and something that the Quad need to clarify on how they intend to promote this.

Liberal Democracies and Multilateral Interests

Australia's previous withdrawal brings up the final contradiction, which lies in commitment. If the Quad are committed to strengthening the liberal order through economic incentives, there is a question of just how exactly they intend



Secretary of Defense James N Mattis speaking to Quad partner, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Shangri-La Dialogue. Photo taken by Vernon Young Jr and courtesy of James N Mattis' Flickr account under a CC BY 2.0 licence.

to do it using free market principles. Keynesianism has largely died in the West, and it is an even harder sell to spend money outside their borders.

When budgetary allocation and distributary questions in their own economies are such contested issues in their domestic politics, it seems unlikely that they can stump up for the amounts that will be needed to seriously compete with Chinese influence. Whatever else democracies are good at, austerity has made them ill-suited to spending money overseas for long-term, somewhat ambiguous, strategic goals. China, with its large domestic surpluses and a strong bureaucracy able to direct these resources strategically, does not face this challenge and indeed this is the fuel of their international agenda.

That said, some early signs of Japanese and Indian infrastructural programmes such as the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor suggest that this problem is not insurmountable. Professor Masahiro Kawai of Tokyo

University recently called for BRI projects to be multi-lateralised to ensure their success, going through existing multilateral financial institutions. The same logic should apply for any Quad projects, which would then be welcomed and not construed as something to be a choice between China and the Quad for ASEAN.

The central questions of where ASEAN's role lies, how the Quad interprets a 'rules-based order', and whether it has the will to fund an economic programme as ambitious as China's must all be answered for ASEAN buy-in to be achieved. ■

Joel Ng is a Research Fellow with the Centre for Multilateralism Studies (CMS) at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. He holds a DPhil in International Relations from the University of Oxford, where he studied norms and regionalism in Asia and Africa.

The Quad in the Indo-Pacific

- *The Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) is an informal security dialogue between the United States, Japan, Australia, and India.*
- *Initiated by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007, the Quad ceased to operate with Australia's withdrawal and Abe's resignation prior to being revived at the 2017 ASEAN Summit.*
- *Since the time of writing, Washington has introduced some economic incentives with the Indo-Pacific Economic Vision (IPEV), which covers infrastructure, energy and digital economy cooperation.*

RSIS Seminar Series on Multilateralism Studies: 'Brexit: The Disintegration of Europe' by Dr Spyros Economides



Presenter Dr Spyros Economides at the Keypoint RSIS

On 2 August, the Centre for Multilateralism Studies, RSIS, was delighted to host Dr Spyros Economides, Associate Professor at the London School of Economics, to speak on the topic of the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union (EU) and the possible consequences arising from 'Brexit'.

Dr Economides began the lecture by outlining the events leading up to the decision. He made specific

mention of the trends in voting patterns for the referendum itself, remarking that there was a tendency for older citizens to vote for leaving the union.

Those who lived outside London and those who identified themselves as 'white' British were also more likely to vote 'leave'. While immigration issues and perceived (loss of) control over the borders were listed as key motivating factors for people

voting to leave the union, Dr Economides noticed that the areas that had the lowest levels of immigrants seemed to have the higher percentages of people voting to leave instead.

Speaking on the possible outcomes of the Brexit negotiations, Dr Economides was hesitant on making a prediction.

When pushed for an answer, he opined that the most likely outcome was a 'no deal' scenario as he believed that the Conservative party was too split on what the regional relationship should look like after Brexit, with a significant number of Tory MPs willing to completely cut ties with the EU.

When asked about the possibility of a second referendum reversing Brexit entirely, Dr Economides believed that it

would only be possible if two conditions were met: first, an early general election had to happen before the exit became fully realised, and second, the referendum had to have the backing of the new government and a new mandate.

When asked about other factors that have complicated the exit negotiations, Dr Economides expressed his belief that the EU has been consistent in negotiations with certain red lines that they would not compromise on, such as the Irish border issue. The Irish border issue remains a significant obstacle due to the Good Friday agreement as well as the complicating factor of the Democratic Unionist Party being in a coalition with the current Conservative government.

"Constructing Images of China: Signalling, Perception, and Credibility"

On 29 August, the Centre for Multilateralism Studies, RSIS, hosted Professor Shaun Breslin, Professor of Politics and International Studies at the University of Warwick, to speak on the topic of global perceptions of China.

Professor Breslin first spoke on the notion of trust and mistrust being the basis for perceptions of power. He emphasised the importance of power being perception-based, instead of being grounded in some tangible measure. Illustrating, he cited how people who studied China inside-

out versus outside-in contrastingly posit that China is a success or falling apart. He cautioned that scholars should be mindful of their pre-existing perceptions which tend to determine how an action is viewed as opposed to viewing an action in itself.

He then spoke at length about how Europe, specifically the United Kingdom, views China. In the 1980s and 1990s, China was seen as an economic market and as a state that would benefit from socialisation into the liberal order.

Between 2002 and 2009, the power asymmetry changed; China has shifted from being a developing country to a strong global power that has declared its intent and willingness to take on a global leadership role. Since then, Europe has viewed its relationship with China as a delicate balance between economic opportunities and a calculation of consequences of engaging with China.

Further, though the Belt and Road Initiative has been received relatively positively by the countries that are direct beneficiaries

of the initiative, it has shifted Europe's view of China to a slightly negative one.

Professor Breslin attributes this to a fundamental lack of trust in China which leads one to view what China does in an adversarial way. Additionally, China has always been debated for what it will be rather than for what it is. With that said, misperceiving China is not entirely the fault of the 'perceivers', however, as an equal amount of blame lies on the 'messengers' as well.

Trade War Threat: RSIS to Host High-Level Meeting

Inaugural Singapore Trade Policy Forum to bring together a broad spectrum of expertise

International trade faces an unusually uncertain and unpromising policy environment. A rising tide of economic nationalism in major economies threatens to undermine the global integration that has promoted growth and distributed it more widely. Multilateral structures have been weakened and trade liberalising agreements are being depicted as a threat. Trade war is a real and immediate danger.

As the clouds of trade war continue to gather, the Centre for Multilateralism

Studies (CMS) at RSIS is convening a high-level international meeting to discuss the menace and what to do about it.

The inaugural Singapore Trade Policy Forum will be held on 24-25 October. It is being organized by CMS, RSIS with support from the Singapore, New Zealand and Australian governments. The Forum will bring together around 40 senior trade experts from governments, the private sector and universities from the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. This broad participa-

tion will provide a mix of perspectives on the problems confronting international trade, globally and regionally.

The agenda covers topics like the threat of trade war and possible responses; rebuilding a stable trading environment; trade rules for the digital age; the crisis in dispute settlement; and renewing a pro-trade consensus and a more inclusive trade agenda.

This is an extremely timely event. Smaller, trade-dependent economies like

Singapore are active in defending a stable rule-based trading environment. Their efforts need the support of the wider trade policy community. This inaugural Forum is intended to launch a continuing process of multi-stakeholder debate on trade issues. The holistic approach it embodies can help provide fresh thinking and inform policy development.

Further details on the event can be found [here](#).

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Indo-Pacific Economic Vision: Role of US-ASEAN Digital Diplomacy

Amalina Anuar
RSIS Commentaries
06 September 2018

US Turn to Protectionism: How Should Asia Respond?

Tomoo Kikuchi & Yohei Tanaka
RSIS Commentaries
27 August 2018

MH370 Report is a Much Needed "Wake-Up Call"

Alan Chong & Chang Jun Yan
Bangkok Post
27 August 2018

Indo-Pacific: US Role in Infrastructure

Kaewkamol Pitakdumrongkit
RSIS Commentaries
06 August 2018

Understanding and Addressing Inequality

Amanda Huan
RSIS Commentaries
24 July 2018

The Quadrilateral Conundrum: Can ASEAN Be Persuaded?

Joel Ng
RSIS Commentaries
17 July 2018

Thailand's Political Dynamics and Consequences for Regional Economic Integration

Kaewkamol Pitakdumrongkit
East-West Center
11 July 2018

Trump's Protectionism: What Future for US Trade Policy?

Su-Hyun Lee
RSIS Commentaries
10 July 2018

The **Centre for Multilateralism Studies (CMS)** is a research entity within the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. The CMS team conducts cutting-edge research, teaching/training and networking on cooperative multilateralism in the Asia Pacific region. The Centre aims to contribute to international academic and public discourses on regional architecture and order in the Asia Pacific. It aspires to be an international knowledge hub for multilateral cooperation and regional integration.

Multilateral Matters is the quarterly publication of the Centre for Multilateralism Studies (CMS), analysing the most recent developments regarding multilateralism by our team. It covers articles on relevant economic and political issues as well as programmes and latest publications from the research centre. The objective of the newsletter is to promote the research being done by our centre, raising awareness of the many events that we hold on a regular basis.

Nanyang Technological University

Block S4, Level B4, 50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798
Tel: + 65 6790 6982 | Fax: +65 6794 0617 | www.rsis.edu.sg