

FRS – Japan Program

Stability and security in the Indo-Pacific: the future of the Quad

Interview with YAMAGAMI Shingo



His Excellency YAMAGAMI Shingo is the Ambassador of Japan to Australia following his appointment in December 2020. Prior to his being posted to Australia, Ambassador Yamagami served as Director-General, Economic Affairs Bureau at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2018-2020). Ambassador Yamagami has previously served overseas in diplomatic postings to the United Kingdom as Political Minister (2009-2012), Geneva, Switzerland as Economic Counsellor for the Permanent Mission to the United Nations and International Organizations (2000-2003), Hong Kong as Consul (1998-2000), and the United States as Second Secretary (1987-1990). Within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Yamagami has previously served as Director-General, Intelligence and Analysis Service (2017-2018), and Ambassador for Policy Planning and International Security Policy (Deputy Director-General, Foreign Policy Bureau) (2014-2015). Outside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Yamagami was Director-General (Acting) at the Japan Institute of International Affairs (2015-2017). He was also seconded to the National Police Agency as Director of the Police Administration, Ibaraki Prefectural Police (2007-2009). Ambassador Yamagami has a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Tokyo and studied at the Graduate School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University.

Question 1: The Quad was initially conceived as a soft security mechanism after the 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean. What would be its role today?

The Quad emerged from a tragedy of immense proportions, and at its inception very few would have believed that it would transform into one of the most significant diplomatic initiatives ever seen in this region. Starting as a dialogue in 2007 before re-emerging in 2017, the Quad has always maintained a central theme of building relationships between like-minded states in order to address the challenges of the region. Whether these are shifts in geopolitics, the devastation of

natural disasters, rapid advances in technology, or the emergence of a global pandemic, all members of the Quad recognize that a collective response to these challenges is essential to promote their shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Following the second Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting, an initiative of Foreign Minister Motegi, in Tokyo last October, the Quad has undergone a remarkable evolution. Last month, we saw the first ever Quad Leaders' Virtual Summit, and the four leaders are expected to hold an in-person summit by the end of 2021. We have seen growing momentum within the Quad

towards the creation of concrete initiatives, too. The Quad leaders have agreed to launch working groups concerning vaccines, critical and emerging technologies, and climate change. Above all lies the significance of the launch of the “Quad Vaccine Partnership”, which aims to strengthen and assist countries in the Indo-Pacific with vaccinations.

One could certainly point to the growing complexity of the strategic environment as an impetus for this evolution, and the recognition by the leaders of each of the Quad nations that action is needed to address the concerns of the people of the Indo-Pacific that will result in concrete, practical solutions for their health and well-being.

The Quad ultimately exists as a vehicle to demonstrate to the region of the Indo-Pacific and to the wider world that countries that share strategic interests and a common vision in areas such as quality infrastructure, humanitarian assistance/disaster relief, and the rule of law can work together for the betterment of all. Thus the Quad is not in any way an Indo-Pacific version of NATO solely dedicated to security issues.

Our goal lies in spreading the concept of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” across various fields, and officials from all four countries are engaged in expounding the benefits of this concept to other countries. At a time when the international order has undergone a severe test of resilience in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Quad serves to remind the world what is possible when nation states co-operate in pursuit of a common goal. While the means and methods they use may differ, they are each committed to ensuring that the Indo-Pacific remains a prosperous and dynamic part of the world.

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Question 2: How does Japan see its role in the Quad, beyond the concept of common values?

The question we should ask is what unique value does Japan bring to the table as one of the Quad partners? First and foremost, under its vision of a ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’, Japan has been proactively providing the Indo-Pacific with the quality infrastructure in order to develop its full potential, thereby contributing to the enhancement of regional and global connectivity.

Proof of this co-operation already exists on the ground. Japan has implemented infrastructure projects on a massive scale in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific. Its reputation for transparency and quality has made it a preferred partner for regional governments, and Japan has stepped up its efforts in training and donations of equipment to countries throughout the region. By working together with our Quad partners, Japan seeks to ensure that one of the world’s most dynamic, yet also disaster-prone, regions is able to withstand the forces of nature and build a foundation for regional growth.

Furthermore, Japan is entirely clear-eyed when it comes to tackling regional and global security issues. Japan is facing a complex security environment, particularly when one considers the East China Sea and the South China Sea. Japan’s policymakers are acutely aware of the strategic imperative for cooperation, and are perhaps uniquely qualified to raise their voices in defense of stability. September

last year saw the navies of the four Quad members participate in Exercise Malabar, the first such exercise to occur in 13 years. Bilateral and trilateral security relations among the four member states continue to expand at full tilt. Japan and Australia, for example, have each dramatically increased the scale of our bilateral exercises. We have a range of agreements covering mutual access to information sharing. Thus, together with its Quad partners, Japan is committed to promoting a free, open, rules-based order, founded on international law, and continues to strongly oppose any attempts to unilaterally change the *status quo* and any attempts to use coercion and threats, including economic ones.

Japan also seeks to build cooperative partnerships with its regional neighbors, first and foremost among which is ASEAN and its member countries. In order to achieve a free, open, accessible, diverse, and thriving Indo-Pacific, Japan regards ASEAN as a key regional institution. Japan can leverage its close ties with ASEAN so that the activities by the Quad are better understood.

Question 3: What room and possible role are there for other partners, from Southeast Asia or European States in a Quad format? What are the limits of enlargement?

The Quad is a vehicle to promote a vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific. Japan will cooperate with any country that supports this idea. This vision, when fully realized, will serve as a means to ensure an “international public good” that works for the benefit of all in the region and beyond. The Quad partners all favor dialogue with like-minded countries that share their concerns and who wish to take active, practical steps to address such concerns.

Evidence of the importance of working with regional partners can be seen in the emphasis placed on ASEAN during the leaders’ summit and working with ASEAN in line with its Outlook on the Indo-Pacific policy. The Quad members are all actively promoting their relationship with ASEAN – in the case of Japan, this took the form of Prime Minister Suga’s visit to Vietnam and Indonesia last year in spite of Covid-19 restrictions. Australia, too, launched its own Southeast Asian support package last year, which has been well received. Just as ASEAN has expanded its own dialogues to include a broader range of voices, so too may the Quad seek to ask for other like-minded states to add their views to the collective conversation.

In relation to Europe, Japan’s Foreign Minister Motegi attended the EU Foreign Affairs Council in January for the first time. Many EU member states expressed their understanding of and support for the continuation of the rule-based international order in the Indo-Pacific region. These are developments that the Quad heartily welcomes. Each of the Quad members has long-standing relations with friends in Europe.

We are heartened by the fact that France, with 93 % of its EEZ located in the Indo-Pacific, has a renewed and growing interest in our region. It is encouraging that France has created a new ambassadorial role for the Indo-Pacific, who also happens to be a former Ambassador to Australia. Moreover, France was the first European country to publish its strategy for the Indo-Pacific region. Not only has France engaged in measures to tackle ship-to-ship transfers in the East China Sea, but France dispatched the aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* to this region in 2019. Japan thus welcomes France’s leadership in making Europe more

prominent in realizing the shared vision of the Indo-Pacific.

Each of the Quad members is striving to ensure that the rules-based order, for which so much has been expended, is not consumed by a philosophy of *“la raison du plus fort est toujours la meilleure”*. We believe that French engagement in various fields, not only in security but also other areas such as development assistance, will bring about a greater balance in the region. The involvement of other states in preserving the hard-won gains of peace and prosperity should always be encouraged, for together we are stronger and better equipped to face the challenges in front of us.

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