

Reassertion Of India-US-Japan-Australia Quadrilateral

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Date: 21 October 2015

During his visit to India in early September 2015, the Australian Defence Minister, Kevin Andrews acknowledged India's critical role in supporting security, stability and prosperity of the Indian Ocean Region. He also stressed that there exists a larger scope for enhanced cooperation on global issues with India as a [strategic partner](#).

The Defence Minister also made a renewed pitch for quadrilateral naval exercises with Japan and the US, as was done in 2007. It is important to recall that a similar suggestion was made earlier by Robert Scher, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Office of Strategy, Plans and Capabilities, in July 2015, stating that the US and India should consider [permanently expanding the MALABAR exercise](#). This would be an important demonstration of Washington and New Delhi working together on maritime security in the Indian Ocean.

The suggestion, earlier by the US, and now by Australia, have been timed well as both the nations are concerned about the forays by the PLA Navy into the Indian Ocean, an apprehension equally shared by India as well. India and Australia are scheduled to hold their first-ever joint maritime exercise, [AUSINDEX](#), off the Indian East coast in mid-September 2015, in which the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) is likely to be represented by an anti-submarine reconnaissance aircraft, a Collins-class submarine, a tanker, and a frigate. The AUSINDEX will be followed by MALABAR (US,

India and Japan) in mid-October 2015 and [JIMEX](#) (India, Japan), tentatively scheduled in end 2015.

With prospects of the US, India, Japan and Australia participating in MALABAR in near future, the likelihood of the emergence of the US-India-Japan-Australia [Quadrilateral Security Dialogue](#) (QSD) has again come to the forefront. The QSD, an informal strategic dialogue among the four countries, was established in 2007. The dialogue was also paralleled by joint military exercises of an unprecedented scale, Malabar 2007, with participation by all the member countries and Singapore. The diplomatic and military arrangement was widely perceived as ‘signaling’ to an assertive China, to which Beijing responded by issuing *démarche* to the four countries. Subsequently, in 2008, the QSD ceased with the withdrawal of Australia during Kevin Rudd’s tenure as the Prime Minister, owing to concerns about Beijing’s reactions. Since then, Australia has not participated in MALABAR, whereas Japan has participated in 2009 and 2014 and is again scheduled to participate in October 2015.

In June 2015, diplomats from Australia, Japan and India met in New Delhi to explore cooperative engagement and address shared regional challenges. The meeting formalised amid the common interests in preserving a peaceful and stable regional order and avoiding a ‘*Pax Sinica*’. [Maritime security](#), in the backdrop of Chinese assertive maneuvers in the South China Sea and increased forays into the Indian Ocean, was at the top of the agenda. It is, therefore, not surprising that the cooperative engagement in June 2015 is now being followed up by a series of bilateral/trilateral exercises such as the AUSINDEX, MALABAR and JIMEX in next few months.

The United States, on the other hand, remains the sole superpower, and the most influential extra regional power in Asia. With its unprecedented military presence in the region and recent ‘pivot to Asia’, makes the US even more closely involved with the two Asian giants and other regional powers. Any security calculus in Asia, without the US, therefore, would remain an oxymoron. The US remains actively engaged with India, Australia and Japan, and shares common values of democracy, freedom, freedom of navigation and the rule of law. It also shares the common

concerns over China's military build-up, non-conformance to international law and norms, and increasingly assertive attempts to unilaterally force a shift in the regional status quo.

The recent suggestion by the US, followed by Australia, for an expanded participation in MALABAR, appears to be a move towards the return of the Quadrilateral arrangement to supplement the regional security architecture in the Indo-Pacific region. The enhanced trilateral engagement between India, Japan and Australia would, therefore, provide a sound groundwork for a return to the QSD in the near future.

However, among the three countries envisioned to be involved with the US in the QSD, India might have reservations as it would continue to zealously protect its ability to forge an independent foreign policy. Also, risks and benefits involved in a Dialogue, which Beijing might consider as inimical to its interest, would be totally different for India and Japan than for the US and Australia.

Today's China is a lot different from what it was in 2006-2007. At that time it was witnessing an unprecedented double digit growth for over more than two decades. Also, post extended period of isolation, China was still evolving in the global affairs. It was also pursuing an aggressive foreign policy, and in the process, alienated most states in its periphery. Even the dividends of its erstwhile successful ['Chequebook diplomacy'](#) in Southeast Asia waned, as most of the ASEAN nations tilted towards the US, in the backdrop of aggressive Chinese maneuvers in the South China Sea. Consequently, China, in 2006-2007, fervently opposed any bilateral cooperation/ maritime exercise involving the US, India, Japan or Australia in the Indo-Pacific region, let alone a multilateral MALABAR of 2007.

Beijing has apparently drawn lessons; it is more confident and is exhibiting a mature foreign policy and decision making. Also, the recent economic slowdown has burst the 'interminable China growth' myth, and China is now expected to factor the economic consequences whilst pursuing its foreign policy. Beijing, therefore, is likely to pursue a relatively more 'settled' diplomacy, than the past decade. The fact that Beijing hardly raised any concerns over participation of Japan in MALABAR of 2014 and 2015 is

a testament to the assumption. Also, there have not been any worthwhile reactions from China on the US and Australian suggestions at expanding the scope of MALABAR in future.

It would, therefore, be fair to argue that MALABAR 2016 could involve Japan, Australia and possibly Singapore. Also, the QSD, involving the US, India, Japan and Australia, may re-assert in the near future.

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