
The Australia–India Security Declaration: The Quadrilateral Redux?

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The Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation between Australia and India, made during Kevin Rudd's visit to New Delhi in November 2009, is part of a number of security agreements being entered into across the Asia Pacific. For Australia the Declaration is a notable step in the process of developing a closer security relationship with India. However, some grant it wider significance, seeing it as plugging a "missing link" in a web of bilateral security agreements connecting Australia, India, the United States and Japan—the four members of the so-called Quadrilateral security dialogue that was proposed and then quickly abandoned in 2007. With the Australia-India Declaration all four members of the putative "Quad" now have bilateral security arrangements with each other, facilitating the further development of their relationships. Should, as some argue, the Declaration and other bilateral security arrangements be seen as heralding a coalition among Asia-Pacific maritime powers implicitly aimed at containing China?

This comment will argue that the Declaration is indicative of the growing strategic importance of India to Australia, a relationship which is likely to develop over time. However, there are some important differences the security perspectives of New Delhi and Canberra, and the relationship is unlikely to be substantially defined by any perceived China threat. This comment will first provide an overview of recent developments in the security relationships among Australia, the United States, Japan and India which have led some to see the development of an informal security coalition between them. It will then examine the content of the Declaration and consider how it compares to the Japan-India Security Declaration. Finally, it will consider the long-term significance of the Declaration and the likely shape of the security relationship between Australia and India in future years.

Recent Developments in Security Relationships among Asia Pacific Maritime States

The Australia-India Declaration is an outcome of two recent trends affecting Australia's regional security relationships. First, have been developments in the US "hub and spoke" alliance system that has existed in the Asia-Pacific since the 1950s, in which the United States forms the centre of a series of

bilateral alliances with key allies in the Asia-Pacific (most notably Japan, Australia and South Korea). This system has been evolving in recent years through the development of additional security frameworks that facilitate direct dialogue and cooperation between US allies. This trend has included the establishment of the Trilateral Security Dialogue among Australia, the United States and Japan (which was upgraded to foreign and defence ministerial level in 2006), the 2007 Australia-Japan Security Declaration and the 2009 Australia-South Korea Security Declaration, as well as a mooted security declaration between Japan and South Korea.¹ The form of the security declaration, essentially a non-binding joint declaration of principles and understandings in security matters, was originally used as part of a revamp of the US-Japan alliance in the 1990s. The form has been found to be particularly convenient in signaling common strategic perspectives and establishing a bilateral framework for the development of mechanisms for cooperation in security matters, without the need for binding treaty obligations. Australia is now party to three such security declarations, although to date it has acted cautiously in giving them significant substance.²

The second trend has been the improvements in security relations between India and the United States and its regional allies and friends. Over the last decade or so, the United States has sought to develop a close strategic relationship with India, seeing it as an emerging regional power that might, at least in part, help balance the rising power of China. After years of steady improvements in political, economic and security relations, in July 2007 India and the United States concluded negotiations on the so-called 123 nuclear agreement, which signaled the *de facto* recognition by the United States of India as a nuclear weapons state and a significant expansion of military and security relationships between them in coming years.³ In parallel, as part of its “Look East” policy, India has since the 1990s been steadily improving its economic, political and security relationships in East Asia, including with Singapore and other key ASEAN states.

Over the past few years, Japan has also been active in developing its relationship with India. In 2006, Japan and India declared a “strategic partnership” between them, with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe writing that: “It will not be a surprise if in another decade, Japan-India relations overtake Japan-US and Japan-China ties.”⁴ In early 2007, Prime Minister Abe proposed the so-called “Quadilateral” initiative, under which

¹ ‘Japan, South Korea Eye Security Declaration’, *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, 9 January 2010.

² With the exception of a defence logistics agreement between Australia and Japan relating to peacekeeping and humanitarian operations, entered pursuant to the Australia-Japan Security Declaration. ‘Defence Deal Looms with Japan’, *The Australian*, 22 September 2009.

³ For a discussion of the 123 agreement and India-US security relations generally, see K. Alan Kronstadt, ‘India-US Relations’, Congressional Research Service Report RL33529, 1 August 2008.

⁴ *Utsukushii kuni e: jishin to hokori no moteru Nihon e* [Towards a beautiful country: A confident and proud Japan].

India would join a formal multilateral dialogue with Japan, the United States and Australia. In an August 2007 address to the Indian parliament, Abe spoke of a "broader Asia" partnership of democracies and suggested that the India-Japan partnership would "evolve into an immense network spanning the entirety of the Pacific Ocean, incorporating the US and Australia".⁵ At the same time, military to military links between the United States, India and Japan were significantly upgraded. In April 2007, the first ever trilateral naval exercises were held between the United States, Japan and India in the Western Pacific and in August 2007, the annual India-US Malabar naval exercise was transformed into large-scale multilateral exercises in the Bay of Bengal involving the United States, India, Japan, Australia and Singapore. These political and military initiatives, taken together, were seen by some as the beginnings of a four-way security alliance between the United States, India, Japan and Australia, aimed at balancing or containing a rising China.⁶

China's reaction to the Quadrilateral initiative and naval exercises in 2007 was highly negative, including criticism that the initiatives resurrected "a cold-war mentality" and marked "the formation of a small NATO to resist China".⁷ In May 2007 China issued formal diplomatic *demarchés* to India, Japan, the United States and Australia requesting explanations about the Quadrilateral proposal and in the following month Chinese President Hu Jintao pressed home the point by seeking "clarification" of India's position in a face to face meeting with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.⁸

By late 2007, much of the impetus of these developments had faded. Over the course of 2007, each of Australia, India, the United States and Japan became increasingly hesitant about the Quadrilateral initiative. Australia declined to participate further in the dialogue following preliminary discussions. The Indian government also faced significant domestic political pressure against any perceived alliance with the United States. Despite support for the Japanese proposal in parts of the Bush administration (including Vice President Cheney in particular), many in the US security community increasingly saw the proposal as unnecessarily provocative towards China. In Japan there was significant criticism of the proposed dialogue from within the governing Liberal Democratic Party, the bureaucracy and the opposition.⁹ Following the resignation of Abe as

⁵ Sudha Ramachandran, 'What Are Friends for...?', *Asia Times Online*, 25 August 2007, <www.atimes.com> [Accessed 16 February 2010].

⁶ For more detailed accounts of these developments in 2007, see Purnendra Jain, 'Westward Ho! Japan Eyes India Strategically', *Japanese Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1 (May 2008), pp. 15-30.

⁷ Cheng Sun, 'A Comparative Analysis of Abe's and Fukuda's Asia Diplomacy', *China International Studies* (Spring 2008), pp. 58-72.

⁸ D. S. Rajan, 'China: Media Fears over India Becoming Part of Western Alliance', *Chennai Centre for China Studies Paper*, no. 46 (29 August 2007).

⁹ Multilateral political-security links among Japan, India and the United States were widely seen as too provocative to China, although military-to-military contacts in a multilateral context was

Japanese Prime Minister in September 2007, the new Japanese administration found it convenient to allow the proposal to lapse.

While proposals for a formal multilateral security relationship involving Japan, India, Australia and the United States were quietly shelved, there remained a significant level of interest in both New Delhi and Tokyo for developing a broad-based relationship as a way of counterbalancing China. This led to a security declaration between Japan and India in October 2008, which will be discussed later.

The Australia–India Security Declaration

The Australia-India Declaration has many similarities with Australia's security declarations with Japan in 2007 and South Korea in 2009, but also some important differences. The Declaration identifies shared security interests, so-called "elements of cooperation" in eight specified areas and outlines consultative mechanisms to be implemented between them. Key areas of cooperation identified in the Declaration include:

- Information exchange and policy co-ordination in regional affairs
- Bilateral cooperation within multilateral regional frameworks, particularly the East Asian Forum and the ASEAN Regional Forum
- Defence dialogue and cooperation within the existing 2006 MOU on Defence Cooperation
- Terrorism
- Transnational organised crime
- Disaster management
- Maritime and aviation security
- Law enforcement cooperation.

The so-called "mechanisms of cooperation" in the Declaration lists ongoing consultation and cooperation expected to take place at various levels. Among other things, the Declaration calls for the exchange of visits between foreign ministers, defence policy talks between senior officials, staff talks and service exchanges, consultation between respective National Security Advisors, consultation on counter-terrorism including through the existing Joint Working Group on Counter-terrorism and sharing knowledge on

thought not to be so. Richard J. Samuels, *Securing Japan: Tokyo's Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 198.

disaster prevention. The Declaration also calls for the development of an “action plan” to provide detail on specific measures to advance cooperation—this is yet to come.

One of the more noteworthy features of the Declaration is its explicit recognition of the importance of cooperation between Australia and India within existing multilateral regional institutions (the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Regional Forum) and in the development of new regional economic, political and security arrangements. While neither Australia nor India readily admit it, they are both geographical and cultural outsiders to East Asia, the current centre of gravity of the Asia Pacific region. There are continuing suspicions about Australia’s participation in East Asian institutions and China, in particular, remains leery of seeing India as part of East Asia. Uncertainties about the place of Australia and India in recent Japanese proposals on new regional institutions are a reminder that Australia and India could do with some mutual support in this regard.

Overall, the Australia-India Declaration should be seen as a notable step in the development of the bilateral security relationship. However, a comparison with the Japan-India Security Declaration is instructive of some of the differences in perceptions in New Delhi and Canberra about regional security as well as differences in the degree of enthusiasm in pursuing a security relationship. In particular, the China factor is very significant in the Japan-India relationship while Australian views on China are more ambivalent. This difference is reflected in the Japan-India Declaration which affirms their “similar perceptions of the evolving environment in the region” (code for shared concerns about China). In contrast, the Australia-India Declaration (presumably at Australia’s behest) steers clear of China, merely affirming a “shared desire to promote regional and global security.”

Differences between the declarations also betray significant differences in New Delhi’s enthusiasm in pursuing relationships with Tokyo and Canberra. The Japan-India Declaration displays an apparent determination to undertake a prolonged and multi-faceted engagement and build a broad-based relationship across multiple agencies that is simply not present in the Australia-India Declaration. In addition to the consultative mechanisms prescribed in the Australia-India Declaration, the Japan-India Declaration prescribes consultation between Defense Ministers, the permanent Foreign and Defence Secretaries and Chiefs of Armed Services, navy to navy staff talks and a comprehensive security dialogue at the Director General/Joint Secretary level. The Japan-India Declaration also specifies a range of military to military cooperation and exchanges including bilateral and multilateral exercises, coast guard cooperation and cooperation between space agencies, which are not addressed in the Australia-India Declaration. Differences in the significance given to the security relationships are also demonstrated in the joint prime-ministerial statements. On signing the declaration, the Indian and Japanese Prime Ministers asserted that the

strategic partnership between the two countries would become “an essential pillar for the future architecture of the region”¹⁰ while in contrast, the Australia-India Declaration was hardly mentioned in the joint statement capping Rudd’s visit to India. While there may have been political reasons for the Indian government to want to downplay the Australia-India Declaration (in light of the ongoing controversies over uranium exports and Indian students), clearly there is no expectation in New Delhi that the Australia-India relationship will become an essential pillar of regional security.

What is the Significance of the Security Declaration?

Should the Australia-India Declaration be seen primarily in terms of plugging a missing bilateral linkage between members of the putative Quadrilateral? Some have argued that, in effect, this new bilateral link signifies the development of the Quadrilateral relationship among the Australia, India, the United States and Japan even if without a formal multilateral mechanism—that what might be seen as in effect the “Quad without the Quad” is now set to take off as a means of explicit or implicit containment of Chinese expansionism.¹¹ There is some element of truth in this perspective. There can be little doubt that the web of security declarations of which the Australia-India Declaration forms part provides an implicit message to China about the potential for enhanced security cooperation among the Asia-Pacific maritime democracies. However, to argue that this web of security relationships amounts to such a coalition—even one in nascent form—is a significant overstatement. As the events of 2007 demonstrated, none of Australia, India, Japan or the United States were, when it came to it, willing to institutionalise a multilateral strategic dialogue in the face of significant hostility from China. Each of the members of the putative Quadrilateral rightly concluded that anything that might be perceived as a security coalition among the major maritime democracies carried a significant risk of dividing the Asia Pacific into opposing blocs and was otherwise inconsistent with the objective of integrating China into a regional economic and political system. While a series of bilateral security relationships is clearly less provocative to China than a multilateral arrangement, the underlying analysis about the risks created by any perceived security coalition remains as valid now as it was in 2007.

What then is the long-term significance of the Australia-India Declaration? While it seems unlikely that the Australia-India security relationship will become an “essential pillar” of regional security architecture, the Declaration does at least provide a concrete document around which Australia and India

¹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, ‘Joint Statement on the Advancement of the Strategic and Global Partnership between Japan and India’, 22 October 2008, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/india/pmv0810/joint_s.html> [Accessed 19 February 2010].

¹¹ Brahma Chellaney, ‘New Australia-India Security Accord: Asia’s New Strategic Partners’, *The Japan Times*, 10 December 2009.

can develop further mechanisms to address shared strategic and security interests. Although New Delhi may not now give high priority to a security relationship with Australia (which is not generally seen as an “independent” strategic actor due to its close relationship with the United States), arguably the value of the security relationship is likely to become more evident over time. Apart from a shared interest in the shape of regional multilateral institutions (discussed above), there is significant scope for cooperation in the so-called small “s” security fields such as terrorism, law enforcement, maritime policing, border security and money laundering. Moreover, Australia and India’s strategic interests will increasingly intersect in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean, particularly as India expands its reach and influence in those regions. There is arguably significant scope for cooperation, particularly in Southeast Asia.¹²

However, there are also likely to be some significant limitations in the relationship arising from differing perceptions of regional security. Most obvious is Pakistan. While India has had some success in “de-hyphenating” itself from Pakistan, Australia’s relationship with Pakistan will continue to be a matter of significant sensitivity to India—as was recently demonstrated by India’s declining to provide naval representation in the Kakadu exercises because of the presence of Pakistan. It seems likely that in order to improve its relationship with India, Australia will need to prioritise its relationships in this regard.

A much more significant limitation on Australia’s security relationship with India is likely to arise from India’s strategic rivalry with China, particularly in the Indian Ocean region. In particular, the “String of Pearls” theory (that China is seeking to “encircle” India with a string of naval bases across the Indian Ocean) is strongly held in some circles in New Delhi in contrast with a degree of skepticism expressed by Australian analysts.¹³ The “String of Pearls” has been used to justify a significant expansion in Indian naval capabilities as well as the development of Indian naval facilities across the Indian Ocean. In recent years the expansion of India’s sphere of influence in the Indian Ocean has included the establishment of Indian logistical facilities in Oman,¹⁴ electronic monitoring facilities in Madagascar,¹⁵ naval reconnaissance and electronic monitoring facilities in the Maldives¹⁶ and arrangements with Indian Ocean states such as Mozambique, Mauritius and

¹² See generally, William T. Tow and Chin Kin Wah (eds), *ASEAN-India-Australia: Towards Closer Engagement in a New Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009).

¹³ See for example, Andrew Selth, *Chinese Military Bases in Burma: The Explosion of a Myth*, Regional Outlook Paper No. 10 (Brisbane: Griffith University, 2007); You Ji, ‘Dealing with the Malacca Dilemma: China’s Effort to Protect its Energy Supply’, *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 31, no. 3 (May 2007), pp. 467-89.

¹⁴ Zakir Hussain, ‘Indian PM’s Visit to Oman and Qatar’, *IDSA Comment*, 2 December 2008.

¹⁵ ‘Indian Navy Activates Listening Post, Monitoring Station in Madagascar, Indian Ocean’, *India Defence*, 18 July 2007.

¹⁶ Balaji Chandramohan, ‘India, Maldives and the Indian Ocean’, *IDSA Comment*, 13 October 2009.

Seychelles involving the provision of maritime security by India either alone or on a joint basis. India has also for some years sought (in cooperation with littoral states) a direct security role in the Malacca Strait, the key choke point between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, at least partly driven by a desire to control China's sea lines of communications.¹⁷

Whether or not these developments have added to India's security, they have certainly increased China's security dilemma in relation to its key sea lines of communication from the Middle East and across the Indian Ocean. In short, these developments raise the prospect of heightened naval rivalry between India and China in the Indian Ocean, something in which Australia is unlikely to want to become involved. As a result, Australia is likely to want to see India "de-hyphenate" itself from China in its relationship with Australia. One could argue that, as the Quadrilateral episode demonstrated, the India—Australia security relationship is only likely to develop as a meaningful relationship if it is divorced from the idea that the relationship forms a subsidiary part of an anti-China coalition. The separation of the Australia-India relationship from the China factor would also be consistent with recent changes in emphasis in the US-India relationship. Whereas the Bush administration made it clear that it wished to see India develop as a strategic counterweight to China throughout Asia, the Obama administration has given been much more circumspect in allowing the China factor to be seen as an important part of the relationship, preferring to emphasise India's role in South Asia.¹⁸ Such an approach, it is argued, would be consistent with Australia's interests.

Conclusion

The Australia-India Declaration is a notable step in the development of the bilateral security relationship, particularly in creating a framework to facilitate long overdue improvements in cooperation between Australia and India in the small "s" security areas, including terrorism, law-enforcement and maritime policing. However, one should not expect too much too soon in the security relationship. India clearly has other strategic relationships with a higher priority (which include the United States, Japan and even Singapore), and has different security pre-occupations than does Australia. Apart from some specific issues (such as Australia's willingness to supply uranium to India), New Delhi does not yet regard Canberra as a key strategic interlocutor on which it is worth expending a significant degree of energy. That perception may change in coming years as India continues to expand its influence in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia.

¹⁷ Gurpreet S. Khurana, 'Safeguarding the Malacca Straits', *ISDA Comment*, 5 January 2005.

¹⁸ B. Raman, 'Gates' Visit to Delhi: Strategic Course-Correction', South Asia Analysis Group, Paper 3618, 21 January 2010, <southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers37%5Cpaper3618.html> [Accessed 21 February 2010].

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