

‘Quad’ spruiks cooperation, but US/NATO militarism is still on autopilot

23 Mar.—A combination of US foreign policy inertia, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation’s endless quest for post-Cold War relevance, and an Australian government desperate for a “win” to offset its mounting failures, risks accelerating our nation down the slippery slope towards war. This month’s inaugural leaders’ meeting of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (a.k.a. “Quad”), comprising the USA, Japan, India and Australia, may have ostensibly taken a step back from the overt military “containment” strategy against China the previous US administration had promoted. But subsequent hostile actions by the USA and its allies suggest that little if anything has changed beneath the surface. NATO meanwhile continues to formalise its intention to expand from a nominally defensive alliance in the North Atlantic, to global enforcer of the “rules-based order”—purportedly the basis of so-called Western liberal democracy, but in reality merely a pseudonym for Anglo-American world rule—in which light it ever more explicitly casts China as the enemy “threat” against which it must defend. Yet it is not China but the USA and NATO, assisted, to our great shame, by Australia and other hangers-on, that have laid waste to whole countries unprovoked, and in the process shredded the international law we purport to uphold. If Australia is ever truly to secure her sovereignty, we must first face the truth: to the extent that it was ever warranted at all, the xenophobia that pervades this country has been focused on the wrong “foreigners”. Immigrants, be they from within our own Asia-Pacific neighbourhood or further afield, are not and have never been the problem. Any Australian who genuinely wants to preserve our “way of life”, and would therefore presumably wish to avoid needlessly replaying the Cold War on our own soil, with its attendant potential for devastating “hot” war and possible nuclear Armageddon, should break from the agenda of our “dangerous allies” (as the late former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser called the USA and UK), and tell the soulless, bureaucratic war machine that is NATO to go back to the North Atlantic where it came from.

‘Spirit of the Quad’?



US President Joe Biden with other “Quad” heads of state (Japan, India, Australia) in their first online meeting. Photo: AFP/Olivier Douliery

After more than 16 years of on-again, off-again, the Quad finally had its first heads of government meeting (via video conference, due to international travel restrictions) on 12 March. At the instigation of the USA’s Donald Trump Administration, the Quad was revived in 2017 after a decade of dormancy with an eye to making it the kernel of a NATO-styled alliance in the Asia-Pacific to “contain” China, as NATO did the Soviet Union during the 1946-91 Cold War. But in their joint statement issued after the meeting, entitled “The Spirit of the Quad”, the four leaders—new US President Joe Biden and Prime Ministers Yoshihide Suga of Japan, Narendra Modi of India and Scott Morrison of Australia—preferred to hark back to the Quad’s origin as what they called a “positive vision [that] arose out of an international tragedy, the [Boxing Day] tsunami of 2004”. Likewise today, they continued, “the global devastation wrought by COVID-19, the threat of climate change, and security challenges facing the region summon us with renewed purpose. On this historic occasion ... we pledge to strengthen our cooperation on the defining challenges of our time.”

The statement outlines plans to “join forces to expand safe, affordable, and effective vaccine production and equitable access, to speed economic recovery and benefit global health”. To this end the Quad members pledged to “collaborate to strengthen equitable vaccine access for the Indo-Pacific, with close coordination with multilateral organisations including the World Health Organisation and COVAX [the multilateral ‘COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access’ program].” An informed US source told the Australian Alert Service that in contrast to the Trump Administration, Biden’s main focus during the summit and related meetings was not on the military situation in the region, but on countering China’s “soft power” gains made via its “Health Silk Road” program of vaccine distribution and other medical assistance. Media reports indicate that by year’s end the Quad intends to make and distribute 1 billion doses of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine, which unlike some others (including both used in Australia) needs only one instead of two doses, while its minimal refrigeration requirements make it easier to store safely and distribute to remote and/or underdeveloped locales. The vaccine will be made in India and Japan, with the USA and Australia providing logistical support.

Whilst it is to be welcomed that the Biden Administration is for once working to give the United States a PR boost by doing something actually useful, it is nonetheless clear that the Quad's agenda remains as anti-China as ever, however much its hostility was downplayed for the public. The leaders' statement does not mention China by name; but it is peppered with unmistakable references to the alleged transgressions the USA and its allies routinely cite to paint China as a threat to the so-called "rules-based order" we are supposedly duty-bound to defend, by force if necessary. The Quad, we are told, will "strive for a region that is free, open, ... anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion", by "promoting a free, open rules-based order, *rooted in international law*, to advance security and prosperity and counter threats to both in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. We support the rule of law, freedom of navigation and overflight, *peaceful resolution of disputes, democratic values, and territorial integrity* ... and [will continue to] facilitate collaboration, including in maritime security, to meet challenges to the rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas." (Emphasis added.)

Japan may perhaps lay claim to scrupulous adherence to international law, if only for want of another option under the pacifist constitution imposed upon it (ironically by the USA) after World War II. India's claim is somewhat less plausible given its occupation forces' treatment of civilians in the disputed territory of Kashmir. The USA and Australia have not a leg to stand on. The USA has overthrown dozens of governments by overt, covert and in all cases illegal means since the present system of international law was formulated (again ironically, largely by the USA itself) in the aftermath of WWII; and most damningly, both countries were co-belligerents in the completely illegal invasion and (ongoing) occupation of Iraq in 2003, justified by deliberate lies about non-existent "weapons of mass destruction". The USA and its NATO allies also illegally bombed Yugoslavia in 1999, in order (among other objectives) to establish Kosovo as a cat's-paw "republic" from which to continue to destabilise the Balkans; armed and provided air support for terrorist militias in Libya to overthrow and murder national leader Muammar Qaddafi, justified by fabricated "human rights abuses", turning the richest country in Africa into a jihadist-dominated hellscape complete with openair slave markets; and tried to do the same to Syria, where even now US forces and their various proxies continue to occupy the nation's main agricultural provinces, starve its people and steal its oil. So much for respecting international law and "territorial integrity"! By contrast, China's last war was a border skirmish with Vietnam in 1979. It lasted one month, and only came about because Vietnam had invaded China's then-ally Cambodia.

Go home NATO, you're drunk

Presumably the relatively moderate language of the Quad statement was intended to forestall potential trade or diplomatic reprisals by China against Australia, Japan and India, which all have critical trade ties with China. It does not seem to have been indicative of any goodwill on the USA's part, given that ten days later it along with the European Union, Canada and Britain—which is to say NATO, in essence, since its European membership largely overlaps that of the EU— "slapped sanctions on China over its abuses of the Uyghur people", the *Australian Financial Review* reported 23 March. "The Western allies on Monday (Tuesday AEDT) simultaneously announced travel bans and asset freezes on four senior Xinjiang officials and the Chinese region's Public Security Bureau, the first time Brussels has imposed sanctions on China since Tiananmen Square in 1989." (There is a pattern here: like the alleged "abuses" against Uyghurs, the so-called Tiananmen Square Massacre never happened as reported. US State Department memos published by WikiLeaks in 2011 revealed that as the Chinese government had always claimed, there was no bloodshed on the square at all, while casualties elsewhere in Beijing were the result of the authorities putting down a violent insurgency, whose lynching and burning to death of soldiers and policemen in preceding days precipitated the crackdown.) Australia did not join in the sanctions, but Foreign Minister Marise Payne and her New Zealand counterpart Nanaia Mahuta issued a joint statement in support of them. Beijing reciprocated with its own sanctions on US, British and EU officials, and pointed advice to Australia and NZ to butt out. NATO, meanwhile, is increasingly letting it all hang out. As the AAS has previously reported, the North Atlantic alliance has for some time been eyeing off the South Pacific as a new theatre of operations, intending to use the supposed "challenge" posed by China to justify a global role for itself.¹ In an address last June to an online forum to launch the "NATO 2030" so-called modernisation initiative, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg warned that "with China coming closer to us from the Arctic to cyberspace, NATO needs a more global approach", and should work more closely with like-minded countries, specifically "Australia, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea"—though he did, in that instance, at least emphasise non-military means of "securing peace".

In Stoltenberg's latest speeches, the China "threat" has been substantially upgraded. "The rise of China", he told the Munich Security Conference on 19 February, "is a defining issue for the trans-Atlantic community, with potential consequences for our security, our prosperity and our way of life." Complaining that China and Russia "are trying to re-write the rules of the road to benefit their own interests", Stoltenberg insisted: "This is why NATO should deepen our relationships with close partners, like Australia and Japan, and forge new ones around the world. Only through concerted action can we encourage others to play by the rules"— which in a Freudian slip, he then referred to as "*our* rules, ... *our* rules-based order". In a 4 March speech to the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium, entitled "NATO: keeping Europe safe in an uncertain world", Stoltenberg cranked up the fear yet again, warning that whilst China is not yet a formal adversary, "it has the world's second biggest military budget, and it does not share our values".

A November 2020 policy paper titled *NATO 2030: United for a New Era* fleshes out the thinking behind Stoltenberg's proclamations—and reveals the sheer hubris and, frankly, evil of the NATO apparatus. The alliance, it turns out, claims as its “southern neighbourhood” (or simply its “South”) a “broad geographic area including North Africa and large parts of the Middle East, extending to sub-Saharan Africa and Afghanistan.” It then laments that “large parts of the southern neighbourhood are characterised by fragility, instability, and insecurity”, that “Instability in *Libya, Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan continues to generate illegal migration that is felt acutely throughout Europe*” (emphasis added), and that Russia and China are “exploiting” these “regional fragilities”. If NATO doesn't like “its” South destabilised, maybe it should *stop bombing, invading, occupying and sanctioning it!* And the only way China has sought to “exploit” the instability NATO has caused, is to offer to help rebuild and re-stabilise those nations by bringing them aboard its Belt and Road Initiative to connect the world with the same type of transformative, high-tech infrastructure upon which China has centred its own successful efforts to lift 800 million people out of poverty in just 40 years. As for the notion that “NATO should deepen consultation and cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and the Republic of Korea ... [including through] engagement with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue”, so as to “seek to heighten coordination on managing the strategic and political implications of China's rise”—after seeing what NATO has already done to its own “neighbourhood”, the thought of such a monstrosity moving into our region should prompt every self-respecting Australian to tell it to go back where it came from and stay there.

By Richard Bardon, Australian Alert Service, 24 March 2021

1. [“NATO invades the Pacific”](#), AAS, 8 July 2020.