

## JAPAN'S INCREASING THREAT PERCEPTION OF CHINA INFLUENCE ITS DECISION TO RE-ENGAGED THE QUADRILATERAL SECURITY DIALOGUE (QUAD) IN 2017

<sup>1</sup>Elisabeth Stefanny Luis, <sup>2</sup>Ilmi Dwiastuti

<sup>1,2</sup> President University, Cikarang, Indonesia

<sup>1</sup>*stefannyluis85@gmail.com*; <sup>2</sup>*ilmi.dwiastuti@president.ac.id*

### Abstract

The paper addresses the rising concern in Japan over China's growing influence in the Asia-Pacific region, which has led to increased tensions and security dilemmas. Japan's perception of China as a threat, particularly due to its military expansion and assertive policies, has had a significant impact on its foreign policy decisions. In response to this perceived threat, Japan re-engaged with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), a strategic forum comprised of the United States, Australia, India, and Japan, in 2017. The core issue is understanding how Japan's changing threat perception of China influenced its strategic calculations, resulting in a shift in its security and diplomatic posture. This issue is critical for understanding Japan's foreign policy dynamics and the broader implications for regional security in the Indo-Pacific. The paper investigates Japan's re-engagement with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) in 2017, in response to its growing concern about China's growing influence in the Asia-Pacific region. This decision can be examined through the lens of the strategic environment, which refers to external factors and conditions that influence a country's security policies and strategies. This study employs a qualitative methodological approach. This study seeks to demonstrate that Japan's perception of China as a threat grew between 2014 and 2016. The change in Japan's strategic environment, characterized by China's military expansion and assertive actions, forced Japan to reconsider its security policies. This decision emphasizes the strategic environment's critical role in shaping national security strategies and how states respond to perceived threats to maintain regional stability.

**Keywords:** Japan, Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), China, Threat Perception, Strategic Environment, Security Strategy, and Indo-Pacific

## 1. Introduction

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, also known as the Quad, is an unofficial coalition of the US, Japan, Australia, and India (Rossiter & Cannon, 2023, p.1). The Quad in the Indo-Pacific region allows its four members to coordinate security measures and is bolstered by a network of interconnected bilateral and trilateral coalitions. The Quad was founded in 2007 following an inaugural meeting held in conjunction with the East Asia Summit in Manila. However, the forum's activity quickly declined for a variety of reasons, the most significant of which was the departure of its founder, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Following that, support for the Quad dwindled, and the concept nearly disappeared from national diplomacy. However, the Quad did not die; rather, it went on hiatus. In 2017, there was renewed interest in the dialogue. The Quad, also known as "Quad 2.0," was reestablished in 2017, resulting in regular meetings and debates among member nations (Rossiter & Cannon, 2023, p. 3). As a result, the four nations resumed their conversation and met in the Philippines for the East Asia Summit. They then agreed to continue discussions and deepen cooperation based on shared values and principles (Envall, 2019, p. 4).

The Quad nations were compelled to form a security coalition to address the long-term challenges posed by China's rise and territorial and political assertions. While the Quad members generally agree on China, they prioritize preserving their sovereignty and avoiding encroaching on one another's power. The informality of the Quad allows for greater flexibility and agility in addressing China's problems (Rossiter & Cannon, 2023, p.1). Furthermore, it allows member nations to achieve their foreign policy goals while also reaping the benefits of collaboration with Quad allies. Australia, India, Japan, and the United States can send comforting messages to one another without the need for formal agreements, which could lead to a comprehensive alliance with security guarantees (Rossiter & Cannon, 2023, p. 2). The Quad's informal establishment has had a significant impact on Indo-Pacific security dynamics and global power distribution. Furthermore, it has influenced the development of regional standards and principles (Rossiter & Cannon, 2023, p.2).

Japan's decision to re-engage the Quad in 2017 was driven by its rising worries over China, which were identified using threat perception theory. Japan views China's military expansion and strong position in the Asia-Pacific region as a possible threat to its security. This view is consistent with the notion of a security dilemma, which asserts that when one state takes measures to strengthen its security, it may be seen as a threat by another, resulting in a cycle of distrust and conflict. Japan's recognition of a security predicament with China probably prompted its choice to collaborate more with similar-minded nations in the Quad to mitigate perceived risks and bolster national security. The second factor is the careful evaluation of power dynamics and distribution. The threat perception theory argues that states evaluate power distribution in their security milieu and undertake measures to uphold or alter this distribution in their interest. Japan's increased assessment of China as a significant danger prompted it to reevaluate the power distribution in the Indo-Pacific area and actively pursue stronger alliances and partnerships to counteract Chinese influence.

By joining the Quad, Japan can synchronize its interests with other influential nations in the area, including the United States, Australia, and India. This collaboration aims to tackle security concerns and uphold stability collectively. The third aspect is deterrent and security assurance. The theory of threat perception highlights the

significance of deterrence and security assurance in influencing the actions of states. Japan's choice to reenter the Quad might be interpreted as a reaction to China's perceived security concern and desire to strengthen its ability to deter and ensure security.

Japan's involvement in the Quad serves as a means to demonstrate its dedication to maintaining regional security and to demonstrate unity with other member nations. In the meantime, it is a deterrent against any potential acts of aggression or coercion from China. The threat perception theory also acknowledges that norms, values, and socialization processes significantly influence states' perceptions of security threats. Japan's decision to re-engage the Quad may have been motivated by the same norms and values shared by member states, such as a solid commitment to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Threat perception theory offers a valuable framework for comprehending how Japan's increasing apprehensions over Chinese conduct affected its choice to re-engage the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue in 2017. Japan sought to boost its security and preserve regional stability by perceiving China as a security concern and actively pursuing greater security cooperation with like-minded nations in the Quad to offset perceived threats.

China has repeatedly trespassed on Japanese maritime territory and violated its airspace with state-owned vessels and planes operated by maritime law enforcement. China's aggressive behavior in the South China Sea exemplifies its efforts to forcefully alter the current situation in the Indo-Pacific. China has been building and fortifying artificial islands in disputed waters, primarily the Spratly Islands. Thus, China also asserts its authority over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands despite competing territorial claims from neighboring countries, including Vietnam and the Philippines. These actions have included dangerous endeavors such as aiming ship radar at Japanese destroyers, maneuvering fighter aircraft at unusual altitudes near Japanese aircraft, and establishing a "East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ)" that restricts free movement in international waters. Japan must pay close attention to these Chinese initiatives because they raise concerns about regional and global security (Japan Defense White Paper, 2014).

This study examined Japan's perception of threats by analyzing Japan's defense white papers. The perception of threat in Japan's Defense White Papers from 2014 to 2016 mainly focuses on the security landscape in the Asia-Pacific region, specifically with the strained relations with China and North Korea. These documents often emphasize Japan's concerns about territorial disputes, military modernization efforts, and provocative actions by neighboring countries. Japan conveyed its apprehensions in the 2014 Defense White Paper on China's maritime operations in the East China Sea, encompassing the recurrent violations of Japanese territorial waters near the Senkaku Islands. Japan's territorial integrity and regional stability were perceived to be threatened by this circumstance, which influenced the region's security perceptions. Japan's Defense White Papers of 2015 and 2016 regularly expressed Japan's apprehensions over China's military expansion and aggressive behavior, particularly in the South China Sea. In summary, the threat perception expressed in Japan's defense White Papers over this period highlights the country's worries about regional security dynamics and the necessity of a solid defensive stance to protect its national interests.

## 2. Literature Review

Several previous studies have examined the QUAD as a powerful means of counterbalancing China's influence in the Indo-Pacific area. The majority of the research primarily focuses on analyzing the effects of the Quad's growth, namely its overtly anti-

China discourse and activities, on the region's political, economic, and security framework, emphasizing the adverse outcomes. Zongyou Wei (2022) argues that China, similar to other dominant nations, would endeavor to exert its influence in the area to align with its objectives. Zongyou Wei asserts that the main objectives of QUAD are to offset China's power and influence, promote concrete cooperation, and alter regional dominance. It is align with Seshadri Chari who asserts the Quad as a strategic alliance formed by these four nations to restrain the growth of China (Chari, 2020, p. 14). Therefore, China is the primary impediment preventing the Quad from gaining momentum during the next decade. Japan, led by Prime Minister Abe, has shown the highest enthusiasm among the Quad countries (Chari, 2020).

Adarsh Badri (2022) examines the Balance of Interest Theory in the context of the Quad Coalition. For example, the type of balancing conduct that the nations in the Quad Alliance use at the individual level. Badri analyzes Randall Schweller's thesis, which highlights the fundamental 'profit incentive' in establishing alliances, specifically focusing on building coalitions within the Quad coalition. One of the primary concerns is the potential threat posed by China. China's assertive military and economic expansion in the Indo-Pacific region establishes it as a formidable power aiming to reshape the current international system and operate according to its principles. China's ascent is perceived as a threat to the current global system established by legal frameworks, and according to Schweller's classification, China might be characterized as a predatory entity. This revisionist state aims to alter the current order's status and hierarchy.

However, Shakthi De Silva (2023) offers a more thorough and extensive analysis of "Quad 2.0: Australia's Reaction to the 'China Threat'" which explores how Australia's view of China as a danger affected its choice to re-engage the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) in 2017. This study investigates whether Australia's assessment of China as a danger is evident in military whitepapers and defense updates published between 2000 and 2016. Additionally, the findings of her study indicate that Australia's increased sense of a threat from China is a crucial element that influenced its choice to re-engage the Quad in 2017. This article aims to provide evidence that Australia's perception of China as a danger has grown between 2000 and 2017 and is supported by an analysis of primary and secondary literature, including Australia's defense white papers, polling data, and other relevant sources.

Based on what has been explained above, each researcher sees and explains the externalities of the QUAD agreement appropriately. Only one researcher explained Australia's domestic factors, both strategically and operationally, that influenced their decision to join the alliance. Unfortunately, none of the three authors explain how other variables or other countries in more detail, such as why India, Japan, and the US want to join QUAD again in 2017 and whether there are certain factors why QUAD 2.0 was formed.

### **3. Research Method**

This research is conducted using qualitative methodology. This study aims to provide evidence that Japan's perception of China as a danger intensified between 2014 and 2016. This will be achieved by analyzing primary and secondary literature, including Japan's Defense White Paper (DWP) and other relevant secondary sources. The problem is analyzed using threat perception theory, which offers a theoretical framework for comprehending Japan's choice to re-engage the Quad in 2017 as a response to the

increased threat perception of China. By analyzing Japan's subjective perception of threat and its subsequent strategic behavior, this framework illuminates the motivations and dynamics underlying Japan's re- engagement with the Quad as a component of a more extensive initiative aimed at tackling regional security issues.

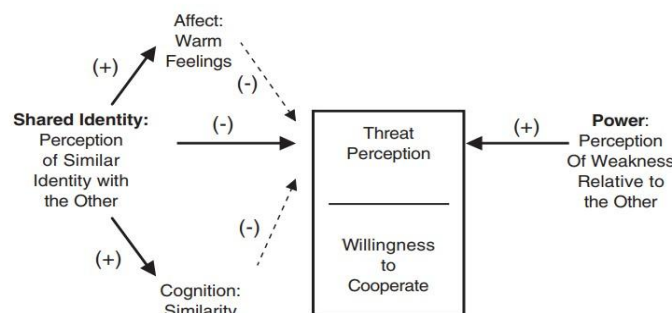
The perception of threat in Japan's Defense White Papers from 2014 to 2016 focuses primarily on the Asia-Pacific security landscape, particularly the strained relations with China and North Korea. These documents frequently highlight Japan's concerns about territorial disputes, military modernization efforts, and provocative behavior by neighboring countries. Japan expressed its concerns in the 2014 Defense White Paper about China's maritime operations in the East China Sea, which included repeated violations of Japanese territorial waters near the Senkaku Islands. This situation was perceived to threaten Japan's territorial integrity and regional stability, influencing regional security perceptions. Japan's Defense White Papers of 2015 and 2016 repeatedly expressed concerns about China's military expansion and aggressive behavior, particularly in the South China Sea. The documents also discussed North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, which were viewed as imminent threats to Japan's security. In summary, the threat perception expressed in Japan's defense White Papers during this time period reflects the country's concerns about regional security dynamics and the importance of maintaining a strong defensive posture to protect its national interests.

#### 4. Japan Rising Threat Perception of China Influenced its decision to re-engaged the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) in 2017

##### 4.1 Threat perception

The threat, as described in the international relations literature, refers to a scenario where one individual or collective possesses the capacity or purpose to impose adverse outcomes upon another individual or collective. The threat model notion suggests that the perception of threats is influenced by the distinction between the in-group, to which an individual belongs, and the out-group, which includes people outside of this group. According to the paradigm, power only influences how someone perceives a danger if they have built a sense of similarity between themselves and another person. Furthermore, the other has been established. If there is no common identity between oneself and the other, the material balance of power will strongly influence how one perceives the threat the different poses. To summarize building the threat model suggests that the interaction between a feeling of community identity and authority influences the perception of threats.

**Figure 1. Completing Explanations for Threat Perception and Cooperation**  
**Competing Explanations for Threat Perception and Cooperation**



Sources: (Rousseau and Retamero, 2007, 751)

Recognizing a comparable or shared identity of self will also result in substantial implications about emotions, convictions, and actions (Crisp & Hewstone, 2006). The level of shared identity directly correlates with the intensity of persons' emotional commitment to one another. Moreover, a collective sense of identity will result in individuals aligning more closely with others. Therefore, a shared identity will be evident in emotionally charged and detached cognitive terms. Furthermore, fostering a collective sense of identity will diminish the perception that the opposing side intends to cause detrimental outcomes for the person. Hence, the presence of a collective identity will influence behavior by enhancing an individual's inclination to collaborate with others. If Jane Doe holds the belief that the United States and Japan have a common identity, it may be deduced that she would view Japan as less threatening than other countries. She should demonstrate a greater willingness to seize possibilities for collaboration with Japan since the likelihood of being exploited is diminished. Hence, by emphasizing certain attitudes and values, a shared identity enhances the probability of collaboration.

In the context of Japan's decision to re-engage the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) in 2017, the threat perception theory theoretical framework offers valuable insights into how Japan's heightened perception of China's threat affected its strategic calculus.

1. **Subjective Perception of Threat.** Threat perception theory emphasizes that states' responses to external stimuli are influenced by their subjective perceptions of the threat rather than the objective reality of the threat itself. Territorial disputes, military modernization, and concerns about regional hegemony shape Japan's perception of China as a security threat.
2. **Security Dilemma.** Since Japan perceives China's actions as a threat, it will likely experience a security dilemma. This insecurity drives Japan to seek security alliances and partnerships to enhance security and counter perceived threats.
3. **Coalition Formation.** Threat perception theory also highlights the role of coalitions in shaping state responses to threats. Japan's decision to re-engage the Quad reflects its strategic calculation that allying with like-minded regional democracies will strengthen its position and provide a collective response to common security challenges. The Quad functions as a forum for strategic discourse and collaboration among member governments, facilitating Japan's strengthening of its security ties with significant regional allies.

Threat Perception Theory offers valuable insights into Japan's decision to re-engage the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) in 2017. From this perspective, Japan's decision to re-engage with the Quad was influenced by a complex combination of perceived security risks, including both conventional and unconventional threats, in the Indo-Pacific area. Japan's reevaluation of its strategic stance and pursuit of enhanced security cooperation with like-minded partners was motivated by concerns over China's aggressiveness, North Korea's nuclear aspirations, and more significant geopolitical developments. By aligning with the Quad, Japan aimed to bolster its deterrence capabilities, enhance regional stability, and safeguard its national interests in an evolving security landscape. Therefore, revitalizing the Quad demonstrates Japan's proactive reaction to perceived dangers and dedication to establishing a peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.

#### 4.2 Japan's rising threat perception of China

China's growing sense of threats has increasingly impacted Japan's strategic view in recent years. The change in viewpoint has significant ramifications for Japan's foreign policy, defense strategy, and regional security dynamics in East Asia. Throughout history, Japan and China have maintained a multifaceted relationship marked by alternating periods of collaboration and discord. Nevertheless, the current geopolitical situation is marked by China's assertive foreign policy, military expansion, and economic dominance, which have intensified Japanese apprehensions. However, the geopolitical environment has changed drastically, especially in the past two decades. A substantial military modernization program of comparable importance has accompanied China's fast economic expansion. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has acquired sophisticated capabilities such as anti-ship missiles, cyber warfare units, and an expanding fleet, directly threatening Japan's security interests.

Significant factors intensifying tensions include territorial conflicts in the East China Sea, specifically around the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, and the broader ramifications of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The East China Sea disputes involve not just uninhabited rocks but also significant national pride, strategic maritime routes, and potential undersea resources. In addition, China's BRI is expanding its influence across Asia and beyond, raising concerns about strategic encirclement and economic dependence. China's increasing threat perception has also prompted significant changes in Japan's domestic and foreign policy discourse. Public opinion in Japan has become more wary of China's intentions, and political leaders are increasingly prioritizing national security on their agenda.

#### 4.3 Japan's Defence White Paper 2014

The security situation in Japan has become more challenging and unstable, with many increasingly evident and urgent elements. Indeterminate and ambiguous variables, such as the matter of territorial claims and reunification, persist. Additionally, there is a growing prevalence of what are known as "grey zone" scenarios, which do not fall strictly under peacetime or contingency situations but rather involve disputes over territory and sovereign marine economic interests (Defense White Paper 2014). Furthermore, there is an evident tendency for adjacent nations to enhance and fortify their military capacities and escalate their military operations. Security problems and destabilizing elements in the Asia-Pacific area, particularly in the vicinity of Japan, are increasingly grave.

Furthermore, China is swiftly increasing and enhancing its operations in the naval and aerial spheres in the area, covering the East China Sea and South China Sea. China has demonstrated resolute action in addressing competing interests in the marine domain by using force to alter the existing state of affairs. China has consistently extended Japan's territorial seas and infringed upon its airspace through the deployment of government vessels and planes belonging to maritime law enforcement authorities. These activities included dangerous actions such as aiming ship radar at Japanese destroyers, conducting fighter aircraft flights near Japanese aircraft, and constructing an "East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ)" that expands upon the freedom of air travel across international seas. Japan is highly alarmed by these Chinese operations and must give them utmost attention, as they pose significant regional and global security problems. Hence, it is imperative to request that China enhance transparency about its military affairs. It is also crucial to foster discussion and exchanges with China to fortify mutual understanding and trust.

The Chinese government has not provided specific information about their weapon ownership, acquisition objectives, previous acquisitions, critical military unit structure, or location, as stated in the 2014 Defense White Paper. Furthermore, China has yet to articulate a clear and precise long-term strategy for improving its military capabilities. In terms of military transparency, the Chinese government has not provided explicit information about its weapons possession and acquisition goals, as stated in Japan's 2014 Defense White Paper. Furthermore, China has yet to articulate a clear and precise long-term strategy for improving its military capabilities. China's demand for greater transparency has created strategic uncertainty in the region. Without a clear understanding of China's military capabilities and intentions, Japan may feel compelled to strengthen its military capabilities and readiness to respond to potential threats from China.

Moreover, some occurrences have caused concern about China's military decision-making and actions, which have been made worse by Chinese arguments that do not align with the facts. The 2014 Defense White Paper did not include any specific information on the reasons for the intrusion of the Chinese nuclear-powered submarine into Japan's territorial seas in November 2004. Nevertheless, it represents a violation of international law. In addition, regarding the incident that took place in January 2013, when a Chinese naval vessel aimed its re-control radar at a JMSDF destroyer, along with other similar incidents, both the Chinese Ministry of National Defense and Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided explanations that were not in line with the actual events, including denying the use of radar. The Chinese Ministry of National Defense provided erroneous explanations for the incident in May 2014, in which Chinese military aircraft were near aircraft from the Japan Maritime Self- Defense Force (JMSDF) and Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF). They claimed that Japanese aircraft had entered Chinese airspace without notifying China and engaged in hazardous actions. The illegal entry of China's nuclear-powered submarines into Japanese territorial seas without permission poses a direct menace to Japan's sovereignty and security. This action is an aggressive conduct that weakens the integrity of Japan's territory and violates its sovereignty.

#### 4.4 Japan Defence White Paper 2015

In Japan Defence White Paper 2015, Japan still emphasize the concern of China's maritime ambition towards Japan's security. China is perceived as a main threat for national security of Japan. China persistently augments its defense spending substantially and swiftly fortifies its military throughout diverse domains. China is trying to enhance its asymmetric military capabilities to deter other countries' military activities in the region. This includes denying foreign militaries access to the surrounding area, building structures for joint operations, and improving combat-oriented military training. These efforts are outlined in the Defense White Paper of 2015. Regarding the allocation of funds for national defense, the Defense White Paper of 2015 said that China's national defense budget for 2015 is at 886.9 billion yuan. Nevertheless, this sum does not include expenses from the preceding financial year, such as those linked to the migration to different locations.

It is critical to note that China's defense budget represents only a small portion of its total military expenditure. For example, the stated military budget is only expected to cover a portion of the costs associated with equipment purchases and research and development. Japan and other countries have long suspected that China's defense budget



is significantly larger than reported, including additional costs such as personnel, infrastructure development, and operations. Suspicions of underreporting and the opaque nature of China's military funding have fueled perceptions of uncertainty and potential threats.

**Figure 2. Change in China's Announced Defense Budget**



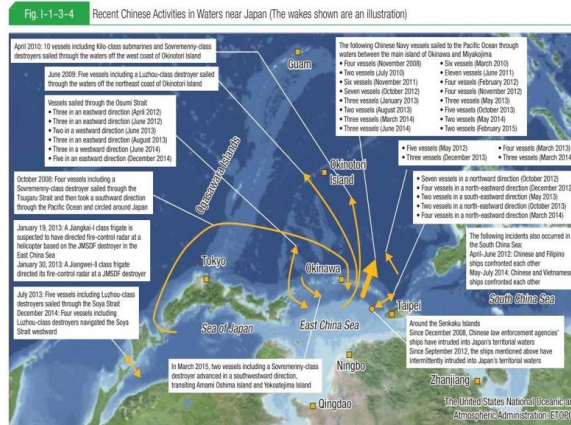
Source: Japan Defense White Paper 2015

According to the Defense White Paper 2015, the Chinese naval fleet has regularly navigated through the maritime region since 2008. Nevertheless, in April 2012, the fleet crossed the Osumi Strait in an eastward direction for the first time. In October of that year, they traversed the maritime region between Yonaguni Island and Nakanokami Island, located near Iriomote Island, heading north for the first time. The Chinese naval squadron successfully traversed the Soya Strait in an eastward direction in July 2013. In March 2015, the fleet went westerly across the marine area between Amamioshima Island and Yokoatejima Island. China's maritime fleet and commercial channels are increasing in the East China Sea and the Pacific Ocean, extending into regions north of Japan. China seeks to enhance its capacity to deploy military forces in the vast expanse of the open seas. China has dispatched progressively bigger government vessels to the waters next to the Senkaku Islands. This extraordinary step directly undermines Japan's sovereignty over the contested islands, and these infractions clearly menace Japan's territorial integrity and national defense.

The Chinese government has officially verified the construction of a recently constructed offshore platform in the East China Sea, located on the Chinese side of the Japan-China median line. This platform has been under development since June 2013 and is being built alongside existing platforms. According to the Defense White Paper of 2015, Japan has consistently made formal complaints about China's independent development and has requested the immediate cessation of such activities. They started in June 2013 as a forceful initiative to independently exploit resources in the East China Sea. These platforms can potentially be used for military purposes and resource extraction, bolstering China's regional strategic capacities. Japan perceives China's unilateral development initiatives as a breach of prior agreements and understandings. Japan has consistently filed formal complaints against China's actions, insisting on immediately suspending such independent buildings. This persistent diplomatic friction highlights the severe nature of Japan's concerns and its perception of China's actions as a direct challenge to Japanese sovereignty and regional stability. The ongoing dispute and Japan's consistent objections underscore the deepening distrust between the two countries. The lack of resolution and

the continued construction of the platform signal to Japan that China is willing to assert its claims aggressively, even at the expense of heightened regional tensions.

**Figure 3. Recent Chinese Activities in Waters Near Japan**



Sources: Japan's Defence White Paper 2015

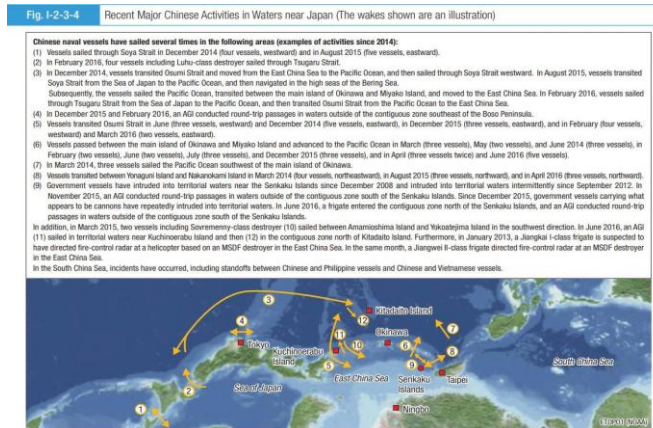
#### 4.5 Japan's Defence White Paper 2016

The 2016 Japan Defense White Paper confirmed that China had consistently enhanced the military's capabilities and lacked openness. This, coupled with its active maritime expansion, has quickly altered the military balance in the region. Based on its unique claims, China's attempts to modify the current international legal framework and disrupt the established situation in the East and South China Seas have raised concerns about security for Japan, the global community, and the surrounding area. These actions also raise the possibility of unintentional consequences due to misunderstandings or miscalculations. The changing security landscape underscores the need for a collective approach to deter aggressive actions and maintain regional stability.

China is said to be strengthening its military capabilities to discourage other countries from intervening in the region and prevent foreign troops from entering and deploying in its nearby territory. This strategy is known as "Anti- Access/Area-Denial" (A2/AD) capacity. China is also carrying out substantial military reforms to establish a joint operations framework that prioritizes real combat scenarios. Deploying advanced missile systems and naval forces in the East China Sea, where Japan is involved in a territorial conflict with China, directly threatens Japan's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Chinese navy boats are persisting in their activities in the East China Sea. According to the Defense White Paper 2016, in June 2016, a vessel from the Chinese Navy's Jiangkai I-class trespassed into the contiguous zone of Japan. In November 2015, the Chinese Navy's Dongdiao-class surveillance ship engaged in a series of deliberate maneuvers, navigating back and forth in the vicinity of the disputed region to the south of the Senkaku Islands. It exhibited similar behavior in December 2015 and February 2016 beyond the contested region southeast of the Boso Peninsula. In June 2016, the same AGI vessel entered Japanese territorial waters. In June 2016, an Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) ship entered the waters of Japan, namely around Kuchinoerabu Island and Yakushima Island. China's daring naval actions have significantly weakened Japan's control and security over these critical waterways.

**Figure 4. Recent Major Chinese Activities in Waters near Japan**



Sources: Japan's Defence White Paper 2016

Japan's heightened threat perception of China is closely linked to Chinese air force advances and activities in the Pacific region, as highlighted in several defense reports and specific incidents involving Chinese military aircraft— major Incidents and Reports on the 2013 Y-8 flight over Okinawa and Miyako Islands. In July 2013, the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) verified that a Chinese Y-8 early warning aircraft traversed the airspace linking the primary islands of Okinawa and Miyako Island, expanding its path into the Pacific Ocean for the initial occasion. This event marked a watershed moment, demonstrating China's growing air capabilities and willingness to project power into areas near Japanese territory. From 2013 to 2016, there was a significant rise in the frequency and scale of Chinese military operations near Japan. These included not only flights by early warning aircraft but also other military maneuvers that prompted Japan to scramble ASDF fighters repeatedly. These activities signaled China's persistent and growing presence in the region, increasing Japan's threat perception.

#### 4.6 Japan's decision to Re-engage In Quad 2.0

A pivotal moment in this realignment was Japan's decision in 2017 to re-engage its stance within Quad. Japan's growing threat perception of China and the broader strategic environment profoundly shaped this decision. A complex mix of cooperation and competition has historically marked Japan's approach to China. As China rapidly ascended as a global power, its assertive policies in the East China Sea, the South China Sea, and its expansive Belt and Road Initiative began to shift regional dynamics. Japan, an island nation with a deeply ingrained commitment to regional stability and security, became increasingly concerned about China's burgeoning military capabilities and strategic ambitions.

In the wake of China's more assertive stance, Japan's threat perception evolved. The increase in Chinese naval activities near Japanese waters and the expansion of China's military infrastructure in contested areas heightened Japan's security anxieties. This evolving threat perception was not solely based on China's actions but also on its broader strategic objectives, which seemed to challenge the existing balance of power in the region. The re-engagement of the Quad in 2017 can be seen as a direct response to these shifting dynamics. The Quad, initially envisioned as a strategic dialogue among four democratic nations—the United States, Japan, India, and Australia—was re-energized to address the growing uncertainties in the Indo-Pacific. For Japan, participating actively in

this re-engagement was a strategic move to enhance regional security, counterbalance China's influence, and reaffirm its commitment to a rules-based international order.

The decision to strengthen the Quad was also influenced by Japan's broader strategic environment. The rise of China was accompanied by a more unpredictable and complex global security environment, marked by shifting coalitions and increasing geopolitical tensions. In this context, Japan sought to leverage the Quad to bolster its security through multilateral cooperation and to ensure that regional stability and security were maintained in line with international norms. Thus, Japan's re-engagement within the Quad in 2017 was a strategic maneuver aimed at addressing its heightened threat perception of China and navigating a rapidly changing regional security environment. This re-engaged underscored Japan's commitment to collaborative security arrangements and its determination to influence the strategic balance in the Indo-Pacific in favor of stability and cooperation.

China's deployment of military forces on artificial islands and its expansive territorial assertions poses a direct threat to the principles of freedom of navigation and international maritime law, both of which are of utmost importance to Japan's strategic concerns. The Quad ministers' discussion on regional issues highlights the significance of implementing collective security measures. Foreign Minister Motegi voiced grave apprehension over China's Coast Guard Law, and the four Ministers unanimously agreed to vehemently reject any unilateral and coercive endeavours to alter the existing situation in the East and South China Sea. This collaborative strategy enhances the deterrent stance against China's unilateral efforts to alter the existing situation. The Quad's dedication to addressing regional concerns underscores the need to respect international maritime rules and conventions. The concept of threat perception emphasizes the significance of collective identities and shared understandings of risk in influencing states' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours. This can lead to more robust bonds and enhanced cooperative behaviour.

## **5. Conclusion**

Japan's participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), which includes the United States, India, and Australia, demonstrates its dedication to achieving a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. The increased frequency of Quad meetings demonstrates the commitment and proactive response of Quad member nations to China's escalating advance on lands that it has no rightful claim to. During the Quad meeting, the leaders emphasized the significance of following international law, specifically the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), to tackle issues related to the global maritime rules-based order. This includes addressing maritime claims and the situation in the South and East China Sea.

The Quad nations formed a security cooperation to address the ongoing challenges of China's rise and territorial and political ambitions. Although the Quad members typically have a consensus on China, they are all dedicated to safeguarding their sovereignty and refraining from meddling in one another's internal matters. In addition, it allows member states to actively pursue their foreign policy goals while at the same time benefiting from the advantages that come from partnering with their Quad counterparts. In the meantime, it may convey a message to China that it intends to discourage any acts of aggression or exploitation by Beijing jointly. The Quad is an ad hoc intergovernmental body that facilitates coordination among countries on matters of mutual

interest without necessitating official commitments or agreements at a high level. In 2017, all four nations, particularly Japan, were acutely aware of and directly impacted by the perceived danger posed by China's actions. This prompted Japan to re-engage QUAD and actively pursue cooperative measures aimed at enhancing regional stability and equilibrium. QUAD facilitates a "trust-based" dynamic among members who may be hesitant to accept decisions from a more dominant party with whom they may have competing interests. QUAD also provides members with the ability to coordinate operations without incurring any responsibilities, therefore offering flexibility. This can be especially advantageous for nations aiming to mitigate the prevalent enduring security challenge posed by China.

Japan's decision to re-engage in QUAD 2.0 reflects a strategic calculation in response to the changing dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region. Faced with China's growing assertiveness, particularly in territorial disputes and economic influence, Japan has recognized the need to strengthen its security posture. The QUAD allows Japan to work with like-minded democracies—India, Australia, and the United States—to address common concerns about regional stability. Japan's participation in QUAD 2.0 aims to strengthen its strategic autonomy while ensuring that the Indo-Pacific region remains open, free, and governed under international law. This move is also consistent with Japan's overall security strategy, which emphasizes the importance of coalitions and multilateral cooperation in combating emerging threats. Economically, Japan's participation in the QUAD enables it to contribute to and benefit from initiatives that improve supply chain resilience, critical infrastructure, and technological collaboration, all of which are critical to its national interests.

After examining the military white paper and updates from 2014 to 2016, Japanese foreign policy and QUAD discussions determined that Japan's assessment of China as a threat has grown. The Defence white paper in 2014, 2015, and 2016 highlighted that the security situation in Japan had worsened. It identified many problems and destabilizing elements that had grown more significant and urgent. These factors encompass Anti-Access/Area-Denial, China's swift and heightened expansion of its operations in the maritime and air sectors, territorial conflicts with China, particularly regarding the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) extending its control throughout the Indo-Pacific region, inadequate transparency in military and security decision-making processes, and China's unilateral actions and abnormal behaviour near Japan. China is commonly identified as a transgressor of the 'rules-based order'.

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