

**Aalborg University**

**M. Sc. Development and International Relations**

Master's Thesis

**The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue - A viable international alliance in the  
Indo-Pacific region?**



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## **Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. As the Sino-American competition intensified in recent years, and especially during the coronavirus pandemic, the relevance of the Quad increased exponentially. The informal security cooperation, involving the United States, Japan, India, and Australia has been hypothesized to become the 'Asian NATO.' The cooperation of these four states has had a turbulent history and its increasing importance today does not guarantee its success and efficiency. Throughout the thesis, specific problem areas that contribute to the fragility of the QSD are analyzed, while also noting that there are strengthening elements.

A brief comparison with NATO, based on the concept of security communities highlights the deficiencies of the Quad. The economic dependence of the members of the Dialogue on China is the primary weakness of the group. Trading within the group is less prominent than with Beijing and the withdrawal of the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership only strengthened this trend. These economic aspects of the Quad-China relations are supported by the hegemonic stability theory and the rational choice theory. Constructivism is used, as well, to stress the ideational differences within the Quad, which is another weakening factor. The propagated joint commitment of the members to democratic values can be questioned with recent concerns about the strength of democratic institutions, especially in India, but also in the US. Realist arguments in the field of geopolitics prove that the shared concerns of the members about the growing Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific region is reinforcing the unity of the Quad. A case study of the COVID-19 pandemic aims to show that the virus put the whole Quad's effectiveness to a test. While the results are not obvious yet, the creation of the Quad Vaccine Partnership is a positive first step in the joint handling of the pandemic.

To summarize the findings of the thesis, it can be said that the Quad is still weakened by its economic dependence on China and the ideological differences inside the group. On the other hand, the shared geopolitical concerns of the Quad serve to strengthen their cooperation. The willingness of the Dialogue to tackle shared challenges, such as the pandemic or climate change, proves that there is a chance for the group to turn into a substantial and effective international alliance in the future.

Key words: Quad, China, Indo-Pacific, hegemonic stability, geopolitical concerns, economic dependence, ideational differences, COVID-19

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## **1. Introduction**

The rise of China and the increasingly assertive foreign policy it has been following in recent years have impacted not only East Asian interregional affairs but global ones as well. The People's Republic of China has been striving for greater influence over regional and global politics, setting the communist regime on an almost inevitable collision course with the only remaining superpower after the Cold War, the United States. Their rivalry, also called the Sino-American conflict, has the possibility of turning into another Cold War between these two political giants. The trade war that began in 2017, during Donald Trump's presidency is just one arena of their conflict. Other than trade; modern technologies; their respective roles in international organizations; their global standing; economic supremacy; and ultimately, the question of hegemony are all areas in which these two powers are competing in. A geopolitical fight is clearly present in the Indo-Pacific region, where the Chinese and American interests clash. The countries located in the region are increasingly under pressure to 'choose a side' in the rivalry of the US and China. However, this is not a choice that can be made easily. The security architecture of many of these states (South Korea, Japan, etc.) is linked to the United States. The alliance system built after the Second World War and during the Cold War is still in place, although it has been questioned in recent years, especially under the presidency of Donald Trump. On the other hand, China has a tremendous economic presence in the region (for example, in Australia) serving as a major trading partner. Due to the parallel influences of both the United States and China in the Indo-Pacific, the countries there are facing the dilemma of opposing security and economic interests. The current regional order in East Asia and the Western Pacific region is under transformation today. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is one of the regional organizations navigating in these uncertain times, but there is another, often overlooked and currently still weaker cooperation that has yet to define its role in the future regional architecture.

### **1.1. Historical overview of the Quad**

The cooperation in question is the so-called Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD), or the Quad in short. To properly address the current role and relevance of this informal security forum, it is necessary to briefly describe its origins and history up until today. The group incorporating the United States, Japan, India, and Australia first came together in 2004 (Buchan & Rimland, 2020). A 9.1 magnitude earthquake near the coast of Indonesia triggered a tsunami on

December 26th of that year, which had devastating effects on the region. More than 230,000 people died and entire cities were destroyed (Reuters, 2019). The Boxing Day tsunami prompted a wide-scale international aid mission, during which the future members of the Quad first came together, as the best-suited states in the region to respond effectively. This 'Tsunami Core Group' helped in the recovery of the affected countries and also proved to be an example of effective regional cooperation. Increased diplomatic dialogues began after this precedent, laying the future foundations of the Quad by trying to identify common interests. The Regional Forum of the ASEAN was where the Quad had its first official meeting in May 2007, during which areas of cooperation were discussed. Later that year, the first quadrilateral military exercises were held, expanding the already ongoing US-India Malabar Exercises (Buchan & Rimland, 2020). By the beginning of 2008, the Quad fell apart due to Chinese diplomatic pressure on its members and the lack of a clear objective. The Chinese criticism about the grouping was mostly about the prospects of the QSD turning into a security alliance; an 'Asian NATO'. India and Australia expressed their opinions that the Quad should deal with questions of trade and culture and not with security concerns. When the latter state officially withdrew from the dialogue, it became apparent that the members were not yet ready for stronger cooperation (Ibid., 2020).

Two processes can be observed in the period after the dissolution of Quad 1.0. Firstly, realizing the need for a stronger political foundation for cooperation, the former members engaged in a slow, but effective relationship-building amongst themselves. Bilateral and trilateral ties were strengthened by introducing new levels of dialogue. Furthermore, Japan decided to join the Malabar Exercise as a permanent participant in 2015 (Buchan & Rimland, 2020). Secondly, China embarked on a path that involved a more coercive foreign policy. The signs of this change were felt in all of the countries of the region, as well as in the United States. India and China engaged in military skirmishes along their shared border and Australia became more concerned about China's ever-growing economic influence over the continent. Japan had to face a more emboldened activity displayed by China on the East China Sea. The United States also realized that strategic competition with China was unavoidable. Their growing conflict was, and still is, affecting not only their bilateral relations but global politics as well (Ibid., 2020).

The two processes mentioned above led to the creation of the 'Democratic Security Diamond', the Quad 2.0 in 2017. During their first meeting on November 12, 2017, the four members expressed their vision of a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific', which involved their shared

commitment to the freedom of navigation, which is something that is clearly in danger from China's assertive behavior in the East and South China Seas (Buchan & Rimland, 2020).

The leaders of the Quad held their most recent meeting on March 12, 2021, in a virtual meeting due to the ongoing pandemic situation. In the joint statement that was issued after the talks, the four countries reaffirmed the main goal of the Dialogue: the guarantee of a free and open Indo-Pacific. Areas in which cooperation was necessary were identified, such as dealing with the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic; vaccine production and distribution; the fight against climate change; investing in infrastructure projects; and meeting the challenges posed by new technologies and the cyber domain (The White House, 2021e).

During the discussion, President Biden, PM Modi of India, PM Morrison of Australia, and PM Suga of Japan all emphasized the importance of their cooperation and the necessity of working together in order to achieve stability in the region (The White House, 2021f). Even though the meeting of the Quad was seen as a success by the participants, one of the most relevant topics for the group was not directly addressed. China and the future relations of the Quad with the East-Asian political giant is still an ambiguous question. 'Challenges to the rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas' (The White House, 2021e) were mentioned, but China, itself, was not. The fact that China was not identified directly as a threat or challenge to the regional order shows that the Quad members are still not entirely on the same page on this matter.

## **1.2. Problem formulation: the future role of the QSD**

After the historical overview presented in the previous subchapter, the main problem area of this thesis can be identified. It can be seen that the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue has a complicated past and an uncertain future. Although the cooperation today stands on a more secure foundation than its initial version, its future role and ability to benefit the region is still widely debated, analyzed, and criticized. The ongoing coronavirus pandemic only intensified the international processes already underway. The most relevant of these is the Sino-American competition. The Indo-Pacific region is located on the front lines of this conflict, its importance, and strategic role are only going to increase in the near future. Due to this reason, it is vital to observe a possibly major actor in this geopolitical chess game, the Quad. When assessing the future role and viability of the quadrilateral cooperation, it is necessary to look at NATO, as an example. Since the Quad has been described as an 'Asian NATO', and China itself sees it as an

organization that aims at containing their economic and military presence in the region, the comparison becomes relevant. The idea that the QSD will become a NATO-like security community is one possible scenario. However, there are circumstances that make this road very unlikely for the members of the Quad. Becoming a viable international alliance is the intended purpose of the participating states, however, there are difficulties ahead of the cooperation. The most recent developments described previously, such as the last meeting in March 2021 is proving that the ‘Asian NATO’ scenario is not a likely one at the moment. While there are areas in which the Quad can work on together, as an alliance, there are still problematic questions within the group that need answering. The increasing tension in the region will require the Quad to characterize itself with a more defined purpose. Certain characteristics of the cooperation will delay and possibly cancel the prospects of further strengthening of the Quad and its evolution into a substantial and effective international forum. For these reasons the following research question can be asked:

### **1.3. Research question**

Why is it difficult for the members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue to strengthen their cooperation and create a viable international alliance in the Indo-Pacific region?

### **1.4. Thesis objective**

The objective of this thesis is to answer the proposed research question. With an ambiguous track record and the possibility of heightened relevance in the near future, the role of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue has become a major question. Whether it can step up its efforts at strengthening the cooperation and effectively counter Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific region is an open question. As shown by the failure of the first version of the Quad, the participating parties are not necessarily willing to take a firm stand against China, due to their economic interests and the possibly devastating effects of such a decoupling. This thesis aims to discover the main reasons behind the weaknesses of the Quad by using IR and IPE theoretical approaches that will later be supported by empirical data. A brief comparison will also be made with the often-mentioned example or possible future ‘role model’ for the Quad: the NATO. Highlighting the strengths and the common concerns of the QSD is also necessary to create a more nuanced picture of the situation.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Research method**

The first methodological consideration that must be described is the research strategy or method that will be used throughout the thesis. This subchapter aims to give a brief overview of this process by elaborating on the core parts of the Methodology chapter.

A deductive research method will be used in the thesis. This means that a number of International Relations and International Political Economy theoretical approaches will be described, and based on their assumptions, a set of hypotheses will be made that aim to answer the research question. These hypotheses, in the theoretical discussion, will outline the reasons behind the weaknesses of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. Based on the deductive research strategy, these theoretically established hypotheses will need to be supported by empirical data. This data will be provided in the Analysis chapter that will either verify or falsify the assumptions made in the theoretical discussion. Following this verification/falsification process, the concluding chapter will answer the proposed research question.

In the following subchapters of the Methodology section, the most important methodological considerations will be outlined. First of all, the main problem areas will be identified, in which the answers can be found for the weaknesses of the Quad. Secondly, based on these areas, the choice of theories will be described: a listing of the IR and IPE approaches that can help answer the research question, as well as how. Thirdly, the choice of data will be elaborated, explaining the necessity of specific quantitative and qualitative data. After that, certain limitations of the thesis will be listed, incorporating obstacles to the writing process, as well as the possibility of other questions and answers about the topic. The concluding thesis structure will give an overview of the whole thesis along with a more visual mapping of the structure.

### **2.2. Problem areas**

Three main topics or problem areas can be observed while analyzing circumstances that keep the Quad together and those that sets the members apart. These areas can also be considered as categories, under which smaller factors and aspects can be identified. Geopolitics, economic and trading relations, and the question of norms and values are the three areas that will be investigated in the thesis. The specific weaknesses and reasons for the inability of the Quad to become a viable international alliance can be divided between these areas while acknowledging

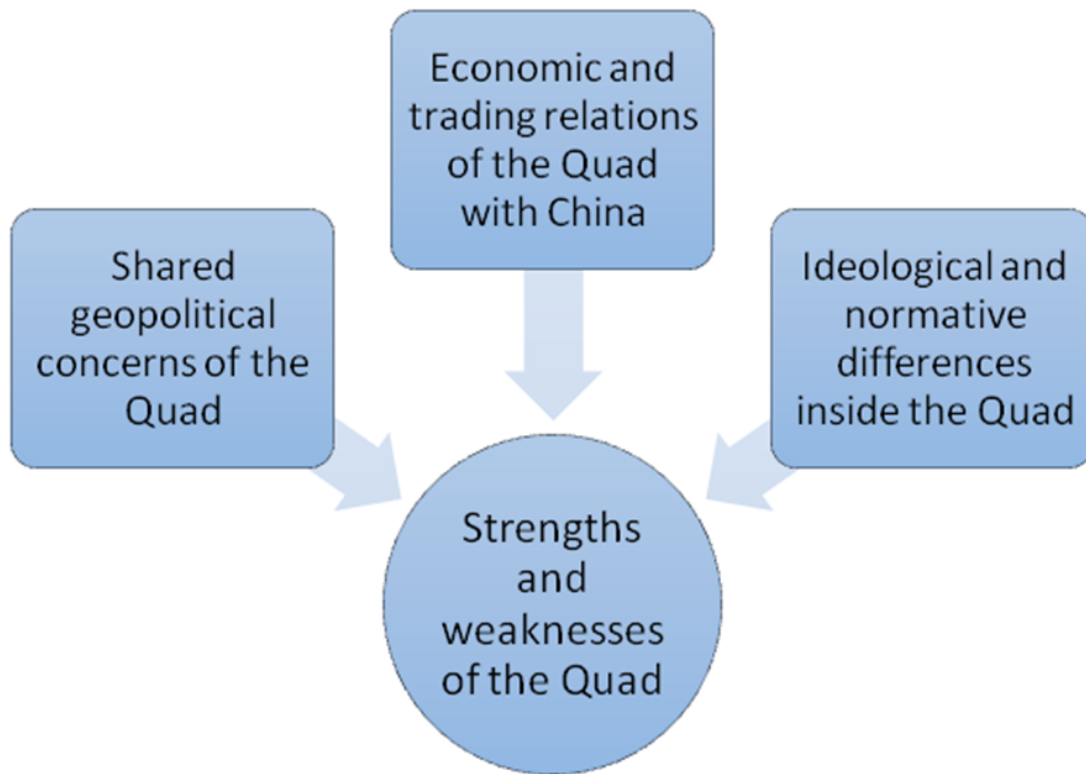


the fact that some of the presented issues drive the Quad towards becoming a stronger military cooperation. Other than granting a framework for the rest of the thesis, these spheres can also help in determining which theoretical approaches are the most applicable for the research question.

The first field that must be highlighted is geopolitics. As mentioned previously, Japan, Australia, and India are all located on the ‘front lines’ of the Sino-American conflict at varying degrees. The US itself is also heavily involved in the security affairs of the region, as shown by the presence of American military personnel in South Korea and Japan, or the extended Malabar Exercises with India and the other Quad members. The geopolitical tensions arising from the ascent of China are affecting all of these countries, such as the armed skirmishes between Chinese and Indian security forces in the Himalayas or the maritime disputes with Japan and Southeast-Asian states in the East and South China Seas. The relevance of military-security issues in the region calls for the inclusion of realist IR in the thesis.

Economy and trade relations play another major role in the politics of the Indo-Pacific region. All of the participants of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue have very strong economic ties with the People’s Republic of China, so while their security interests might be in alignment, their economic interests are more dependent on Beijing. The Belt and Road Initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank can be put in stark contrast with the Trans-Pacific Partnership, from which the US withdrew under the Trump Administration. Due to the fact that economic interests are behind one of the major weaknesses of the Quad, the inclusion of IPE approaches in the theoretical chapter is necessary.

Lastly, the importance of ideology, norms, and values cannot be ignored as an explanatory factor in the analysis of the Quad. Democratic values are officially a driving force behind the mission of the quadrilateral cooperation, however, there are differences in the strengths of democratic institutions in the respective states. Recent concerns about the state of Indian democracy and the erosion of trust towards American leadership in global affairs are all signs of normative differences among the QSD. For this reason, social constructivism is the third major theoretical approach that shall be applied to the case.



These three areas and the applicable theoretical approaches can all help in shedding more light on the specific strengths and weaknesses of the Dialogue. In the Analysis, these three topics will be described more thoroughly, preceded by an introductory chapter about the Quad-NATO comparison and followed by a case study. Concluding the analysis with a case study about the coronavirus pandemic is beneficial for multiple reasons. First of all, the COVID-19 pandemic can be understood as a test for the Quad's efficiency and its ability to cooperate on a shared issue. Secondly, the pandemic has wide-ranging consequences, which necessitates the application of all three theoretical approaches. A complex and ongoing challenge like the pandemic and the vaccination efforts are helpful in assessing the viability of the QSD.

### **2.3. Choice of theories**

This chapter of the Methodology aims to identify the theoretical perspectives of International Relations (IR) and International Political Economy (IPE), that can help in finding the reasons behind the weaknesses of the Quad and thus answering the research question. Besides listing the necessary theories, the reasons behind using them will be outlined, as well, explaining their usefulness and applicability to the specific case of the QSD.

In order to find the reasons behind the weaknesses of the Quad, more than one theoretical approach must be applied. Due to the fact that the fragility of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue can be explained by multiple reasons, involving political, economic, and ideological ones alike, the choice of theories must reflect this complexity. The chosen theoretical approaches aim to reflect the multifaceted nature of the answer.

### **2.3.1. Defensive vs. offensive realism and the security dilemma**

The realist paradigm of IR is one of the most influential theoretical approaches in the area of world politics. It has undergone several changes throughout its history, expanding its focus and creating several theoretical branches that aim to explain different aspects of international relations. A distinction must be made between classical realism and social science realism (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019). While the former mostly describes the basic normative assumptions about international politics, the latter involves scientific approaches, such as strategic, structural, and neoclassical realism. The structural branch or neorealism is the one that is chosen to be applied to the research question. More specifically, the conflicting ideas of two prominent neorealist scholars will be used, the defensive realism of Kenneth Waltz and the offensive realism of John Mearsheimer (Ibid., 2019). These two theories aim to show the approaches of the US and China about the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, thus setting the political environment in which the group must define itself. Due to the fact that China's hostility and distrust towards the quadrilateral cooperation is one of the reasons behind the fragility of the Quad, a theoretical explanation is necessary to understand this attitude. Offensive realism can explain that China sees the Quad as a US-led attempt at curbing its influence and power in the region. On the other hand, defensive realism can describe the point of view of the US, seeing the Quad as a necessary tool to defend its security interests in the Western Pacific region.

There is a major theoretical concept that influences the entire realist paradigm of IR, namely the security dilemma. The perceived security threats, that drive a state towards strengthening its own military, lead the affected countries towards further militarization. Thus the risk of an armed conflict increases, due to the insecurity of states (Dunne & Schmidt, 2017). This idea plays a major role in the theories of defensive and offensive realism, so the inclusion of this concept as an additional explanatory factor is a necessary step, while analyzing the geopolitical situation between the Quad and China.

### **2.3.2. IPE approaches: the hegemonic stability theory and the rational choice theory**

Economic reasons are as responsible for the weaknesses of the QSD, as political ones. American influence and its hegemonic role were based on its economic might and its will to guarantee an open and secure trading system, just as much as on the military power of the US. Under the presidency of Donald Trump, the US abandoned the economic leadership role of the international order. A major example of this shift was the withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which could have been a huge step towards creating a free trade regime between the US and the Western Pacific Region. On the other hand, China has been expanding its economic presence in the region, as shown by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The relevance of economy and trade in the Sino-American competition makes the inclusion of an International Political Economy (IPE) perspective necessary.

The hegemonic stability theory is dealing with the correlation between the liberal economic order and a hegemonic power that must be able and willing to create and sustain it (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019). As mentioned previously, this role was fulfilled by the US after the Second World War and even more after the collapse of the Soviet Union, however today its position is questionable. China has been striving for more influence in the maintenance of the framework of the world economy in recent years. An open and secure free trading system that is one of the top goals of the Quad is in danger, while the question of hegemony is undecided in the region.

Even though the rational choice theory is not dealing exclusively with economic matters, its basic assumptions are relevant to the case of the Quad. Rational choices are believed to play a decisive role in international affairs, highlighting the level of individuals and politicians. Decisions made, based on this theory are carefully deliberated, taking into account the future risks and benefits of a specific action (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019). This theoretical approach can be used to answer why certain members of the QSD prioritize their trading relations with China, over aligning themselves with the United States' anti-China policies.

### **2.3.3. Social constructivism and constructivist IR**

Finally, social constructivism and its application to IR can serve as a basis for a theoretical discussion. Common ideas and shared knowledge are crucial elements of the Quad, thus introducing the theory that puts its emphasis upon them is a logical choice. Another weakness

of the Quad can be identified with the help of this approach, namely that these states still have differences in their political cultures. These differences can slow down the process of creating a common identity for the QSD. Alexander Wendt's categorization of the cultures of anarchy can be applied to the Indo-Pacific region, highlighting that they have not reached the level of a Kantian culture, which would be needed to form a viable international alliance (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019).

#### **2.4. Choice of data**

The other major methodological consideration that must be described other than the choice of theoretical approaches is the choice of data. While assumptions can be made based on the theories in the theoretical discussion, these assumptions need to be verified or falsified. The Analysis chapter serves to fulfill this role. In order to verify or falsify the theoretically based assumptions, empirical data must be collected. The purpose of this subchapter is to outline the types of empirical data that will be used in the Analysis.

The different theoretical approaches necessitate the collection of an assortment of data. Primary and secondary sources will be used in the thesis, such as transcripts of discussions and speeches of political leaders and statistical data (primary), as well as academic books, journal articles, essays, commentaries, and reviews (secondary).

The data used throughout the analysis will be both quantitative (statistics about economic power differentials) and qualitative (speeches, official statements, academic articles, or national security agendas).

While using realist reasoning to answer the research question, qualitative data will be needed. The defensive-offensive realist approach describing the Sino-American competition can be supported with qualitative data, by analyzing the official statements made by state leaders or other public officials in their respective countries. Secondary sources, such as newspaper articles or academic reports can also support the arguments in the theoretical discussion.

For the hegemonic stability theory and the rational choice theory, both quantitative and qualitative data will be necessary, meaning statistics about the economic capabilities of China, as well as articles about the shrinking role of the United States in economic matters of the Indo-Pacific.

The constructivist approach explores the different political cultures of the Quad and normative aspects of the regional affairs. Thus, primarily qualitative data is necessary for the analysis of this approach.

## **2.5. Limitations**

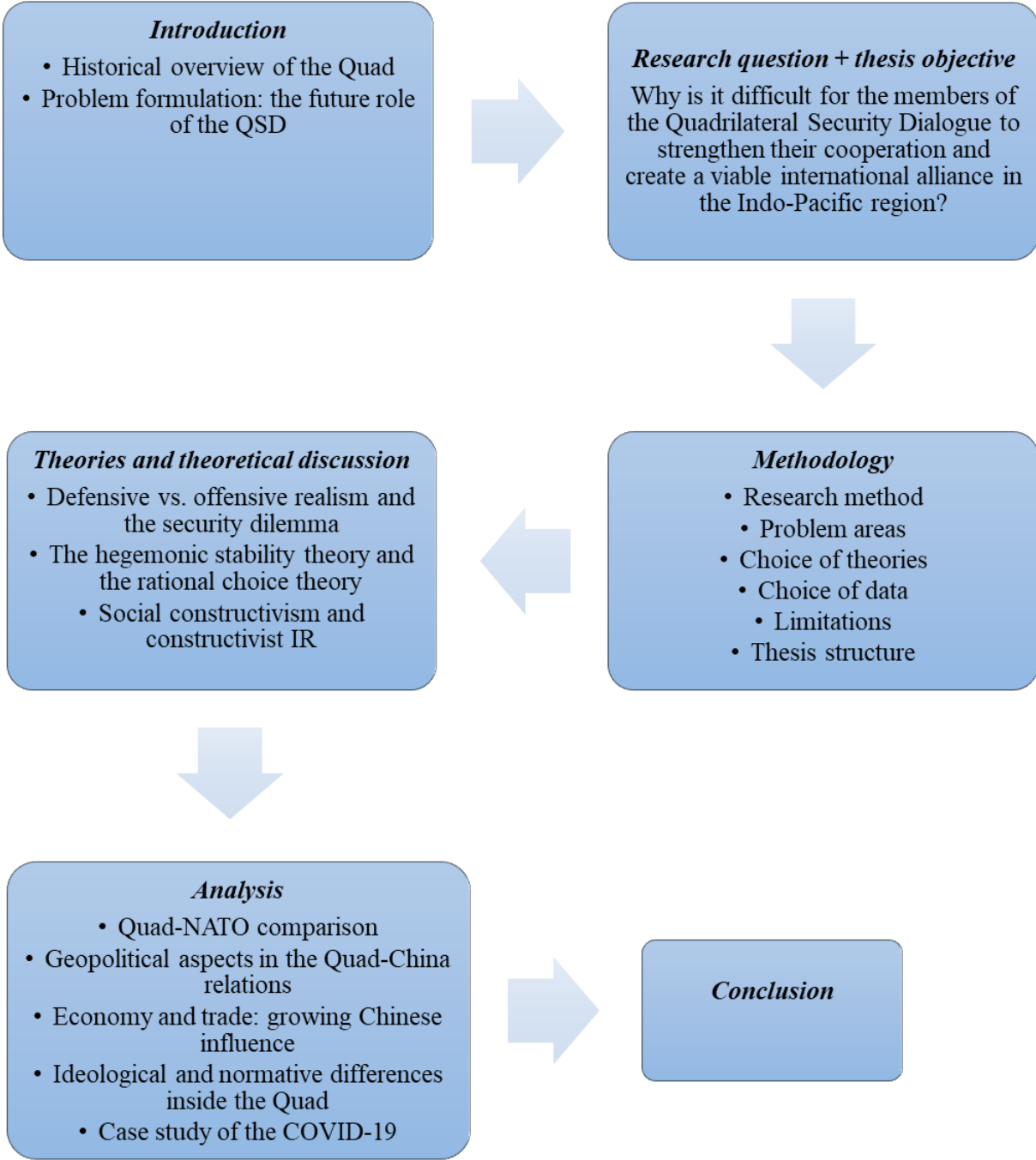
The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and its future role are widely discussed and debated topics today. Several possible research questions can be asked about its legitimacy, viability, and effectiveness in countering Chinese ambitions in the Indo-Pacific region. A major obstacle to the writing process and to the formation of the research question itself is the ongoing nature of the debate. The Sino-American competition has only been exacerbated due to the coronavirus pandemic and its result is still undecided. The Covid-19 pandemic has been ravaging all over the world for more than a year now and its exact effects and consequences on world politics and the global economy are still unclear. Thus, the pandemic further strengthens the element of uncertainty about international affairs and in the case of this thesis, the Quad's future prospects. Changes in the political leadership of participating states of the security dialogue can also greatly alter the course of events. A new government can embark on a different path than its predecessor and this shift can impact the conduct of foreign policy in relevant ways. A clear example of this change was the decision of the newly-elected Rudd Administration in Australia in 2007, to withdraw the country from the Quad's first iteration (Buchan & Rimland, 2020). A similar change today in any of the member states could dismantle the quadrilateral format altogether.

Furthermore, another limitation of the thesis can be identified in the complexity of the topic itself. Several reasons can be found behind the visible weaknesses of the Quad, and this thesis is not able to discover all of them. While trying to identify the most relevant ones, certain aspects might be neglected. Not all of the variables will be included due to the high amount of them.

## **2.6. Thesis structure**

This thesis consists of five main chapters. The Introduction includes a historical overview of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, followed by the problem formulation (identifying the main problem area), the proposed research question, and the objective of the thesis. The Methodology chapter describes the research strategy or method, the problem areas, the choice of theories, the choice of data, limitations, and the thesis structure overview. The third main chapter is the Theory and theoretical discussion, where the main assumptions of the chosen theoretical approaches are described, followed by a discussion part, where these assumptions are applied

to the case of the Quad. In the Analysis chapter, empirical data is provided to support the hypotheses, after which the concluding chapter overviews the research process and aims to answer the proposed research question.



### **3. Theories and theoretical discussion**

#### **3.1. Realist approach**

As outlined in the methodological considerations, the realist theoretical approach to International Relations serves to explain some of the concerns and fears of the members of the Quad that tie them together, but also some of its weaknesses. The following subchapter describes the relevant realist approaches, the defensive, and offensive realist theories, and the concept of the security dilemma related to them. In the second part of the subchapter, the theoretical discussion applies the main statements and assumptions of these approaches to the case of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, highlighting the effects of geopolitical aspects on the Quad-China relationship.

##### **3.1.1. Defensive vs. offensive realism and the security dilemma**

Prior to the description of the chosen theories of defensive and offensive realism, it is important to briefly introduce the basic tenets of realist IR. As one of the major theoretical approaches, realist thinking has influenced numerous scholars throughout history. Classical realist thinkers, such as Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, or Morgenthau, all shared a very similar, pessimistic view about human nature and international affairs alike (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019). Since the statesmen conducting foreign affairs were believed to be constantly striving for more power, this attitude affected their political style as well. Realism considers power maximization to be the main goal of politics. International affairs are thus conflictual in nature, the states can never fully trust each other, as the national interests of one will ultimately hurt another state. The international system is anarchical, and the driving principles of politics are the survival of the state and the protection of national interests (Ibid., 2019).

While the previously described normative deliberations of classical realism strongly influenced the entirety of this IR paradigm, more recent realist theories are increasingly focusing on the analysis of the international system as a whole. Social science realism includes the strategic, structural, and neoclassical branches of realism (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019). The focus of the following chapter will be on the structural one, which can also be called neorealism.

The most influential neorealist scholar is considered to be Kenneth Waltz, who developed the theory of structural realism (alternatively called neorealism or defensive realism) in his book,



the 'Theory of International Politics', which was published in 1979 (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019). Waltz attempted to describe the international political system in a scientific way. The result was a rather vague theory that does not wish to predict specific foreign policy outcomes but instead aims to identify the constraints of the system that limits the choices of foreign policymakers. While classical realists tend to focus on the level of individual decision-makers, and at the state level, Waltz believes that the systemic level is the most dominant one. The theory itself is called a 'systemic theory'. According to neorealism, the international system is anarchic in nature, meaning there is no higher authority above the level of sovereign states (Waltz, 1979). These states are the building units of the international system and their basic functions are believed to be the same everywhere, namely ensuring their survival and securing their national interests. Hierarchy is the other organizing principle other than anarchy, and it is present between the units of the system. The distribution of power between states is based on their different capabilities, which ultimately decides their foreign policy choices. Great powers with stronger militaries and economies are playing decisive roles in international affairs (Ibid., 1979). In Waltz's view, the differences in the distribution of power are responsible for conflicts, wars, and ultimately changes in the structure of the system. In structural realism, the two most common types of the international system are bipolarity and multipolarity. The bipolar system that characterized the Cold War era was believed to be more stable and peaceful than the multipolarity before 1945 (Waltz, 1979). The perceived multipolar world order today is thus considered to be more violent and conflict-ridden.

There is another major assumption of structural realism that is also the reason behind why it is also called 'defensive realism'. In Waltz's view, all states strive for security above all. Power in itself is only considered to be the means to achieve the goal of security. Thus, countries aim to have adequate power for securing themselves. Power-maximization is not a logical step following this line of thought, because it will only cause the creation of a united front of other states who feel threatened by this process and wish to reverse it (Waltz, 1989).

The theory of offensive realism was developed by John Mearsheimer and it can be understood as the continuation of Kenneth Waltz's neorealist approach. At the same time, it also serves as an alternative, due to certain differences between the two theories. Mearsheimer shares most of the assumptions of Waltz about the anarchic international system, the importance of different capabilities, and competing national interests. Bipolarity is once again 'praised' for being a more stable and peaceful system compared to multipolarity (Mearsheimer, 1993). After the end of the Cold War, Mearsheimer believed that peace would be more fragile and difficult to uphold

due to the reemergence of great power competition. With the disappearance of the superpower rivalry and the rough equilibrium between the US and the Soviet Union, the new multipolar order was believed to be more unstable. The relative peacefulness of the Cold War was the result of an actually balanced balance of power, which afterward seemed to become more unstable and began shifting due to the emergence of new powers (Ibid., 1993).

The major difference from Waltz's theory is present in the perceived intentions of states. Mearsheimer called Waltz's approach defensive realism because according to that theory states seek to maximize their security with the necessary amount of power, but no more than that. The basic tenet of offensive realism is that states are aiming to become the hegemon in the international system because that is the only way to ensure their security in the long term. Based on this more pessimistic view, the members of the system will always attempt to maximize their power until they become the global hegemon (Mearsheimer, 2001). Due to geographical limitations, achieving global hegemony is impossible, however striving towards it is not. In order to ensure one's regional hegemony, one may do everything in its power to stop other states from becoming the hegemon in their regions. The existing hegemon aims to maintain its security through curbing other prospective hegemon's ascendance (Ibid., 2001). Another major difference of the offensive realist approach is that in their view, weaker states are more likely to 'submit' themselves to a stronger, emerging hegemon (bandwagoning), instead of cooperating to balance against it, as the defensive realists claim (Dunne & Schmidt, 2017).

The security dilemma is one of the most widely agreed theoretical concepts shared by realist scholars. The idea itself can be traced back to an early classical realist thinker, Thomas Hobbes, however, the term was first used by John Herz in 1951. The primary role of states is to protect their citizens, and territory from any kind of (perceived) security threats. Part of this task requires maintaining a capable military force and other security measures (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019).

The problem arises because states can never be sure of the real intentions of other states in the international system. While the reason for the buildup of armed forces might be strictly for defensive reasons, others might interpret it as a warning sign of a subsequent attack against them. In turn, they increase their own military expenditures, which will only serve to further increase the security fears of others. This spiral of insecurity regarding the intentions of states originates from the anarchic nature of the system. The result of this security dilemma can be an intensifying arms race, which heightens the risk of an armed conflict that can be based solely on a misunderstanding (Dunne & Schmidt, 2017).

### **3.1.2. Theoretical discussion: Quad, the answer to shared geopolitical concerns?**

The previously presented realist IR theories and concepts can be applied to the case of the Quad and its relationship to China. The geopolitical aspect of the Sino-American competition is constantly growing in significance. Several recent events can illustrate this point. China's maritime disputes and growing presence in the East and South China Seas are alarming for the whole region. On the East China Sea, Japan has had to face more than one incident due to China's legal claims to certain areas, while the disputes on the South China Sea regarding the creation of artificial islands on contested waters pits some of the Southeast Asian states against Beijing. Taiwan is facing the ever-growing fear of China overtaking the island, demonstrated by the increasingly bolder incursions of Chinese military aircrafts into Taiwanese airspace. India also had its border issues with China in the Himalayas. The United States has been trying to repair the damage inflicted by the Trump Administration in the standing of the US in the region as a trustworthy ally in recent months. Since geopolitics is playing a huge role in its conflict with Beijing, Washington is likely to strengthen its interests and presence in the Western Pacific.

Realist arguments can be easily identified in this situation. The competition between the United States and China fits into the worldview of realism, a constant fight for power and influence. In an anarchic international system, these political giants are fighting for the most vital realist reasons, the survival of the state and the expansion of national interests. Conflictual state relations, power maximization, and the dilemma of uncertainty are all realist assumptions that can be found in this case to a certain extent. The fact that geopolitical considerations and military-security aspects are parts of this superpower rivalry, is strengthening the argument of realism (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019).

Based on Kenneth Waltz's structural realist theory, the current situation between the United States and China can be described with the general setting of the theory: an anarchic international system. With the rise of China in recent years and the relative decline of the US, the hierarchy of the international system seems to be changing. As the military and economic capabilities of Beijing are on the way to catching up to Washington's, the shifting distribution of power between them can explain their conflict today. Considering the fact that neorealism claims that the bipolarity of the Cold War was more stable than multipolarity, the currently

changing world order can be seen as unstable and ripe for conflict. The Sino-American competition is one of the signs of this instability (Waltz, 1979).

The reason why the United States would like to strengthen the Quad can be explained by defensive realist reasoning. China's growing influence in world politics and regional affairs alike can be easily understood by the US as an attempt at reaching a hegemonic status (Waltz, 1989). This will ultimately threaten the security interests of the current hegemon, the US, so in order to maximize their security, the US must counter the rise of China. Thus, the greater activity of the US in the Indo-Pacific and the Quad itself can be seen as defensive measures from the side of the US. Containing China with the help of the Quad can be understood as acts of security maximization (Ibid., 1989). Building a coalition that involves the major powers in the Indo-Pacific region, other than China, is a necessary step for Washington if it aims to counter the influence of Beijing.

As for the other members of the Quad, the same defensive argument can be identified behind their participation in the Dialogue. India, Japan, and Australia all share geopolitical concerns about China to varying degrees. Japan and India are more affected in this matter due to geographical proximity. Based on the defensive realist argument, the members of the Quad are likely to strengthen their cooperation to counter China's ambitions in the Western Pacific (Waltz, 1989).

On the other hand, China's foreign policy decisions, as well as its hostility and mistrust towards the Quad can be explained by the same neorealist theory. China might perceive the actions of the US and the mere existence of the QSD as signs of encroachment. Their stance towards the Dialogue might reflect the fear of expanding American interests that will ultimately limit its own and threaten the security of China (Waltz, 1989).

To identify the reasons behind China's position towards the Quad, the offensive realist theory of John Mearsheimer offers a clearer picture. The assumption of Mearsheimer, which states that the end of bipolarity will bring about a new era of great power competition and a more unstable international order seems to be proven true today in the form of the Sino-American competition (Mearsheimer, 1993).

The major claim of offensive realism is that states are power-maximizers, it is the ultimate goal and not simply the means. Thus, hegemons are not expected to stop once their security is guaranteed. They are going to strive for global hegemony because that is the only way of maintaining their status and security (Mearsheimer, 2001). China can easily see the attempts of

the US to gain a stronger foothold on its doorstep as signs of intended global hegemony. Since achieving global hegemony is geographically impossible, Washington would do everything in its power to end Beijing's regional hegemonic role. The mere existence of the Quad is thus perceived as a threat to China's national security, and as a tool that America uses to solidify its hegemonic status (Ibid., 2001). Furthermore, in China's eyes, the QSD can be accused of bandwagoning: aligning their interests with the hegemonic United States, because they are not strong enough to resist (Dunne & Schmidt, 2017).

The security dilemma can also be identified behind the conflict in question. The whole race between the US and China can be traced back to this concept. The unknown intentions of these states are causing each other to distrust and fear each other and subsequently militarize their relations. The competition in the fields of military, economy, trade, and technology can essentially be explained by this spiral of insecurity (Dunne & Schmidt, 2017).

Looking at the Quad, as a whole, two different assumptions can be made about the group, based on realist arguments. As mentioned previously, the cooperation of these states enables them to coordinate their responses to China, while also creating a unified front. Shared dilemmas and joint commitments in solving such issues enable the Quad to have a stronger voice and international recognition. However, realism also criticizes international cooperations due to their perceived inevitable decline, which eventually results from contrasting interests. The participating states of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue do not agree on every single issue and this aspect of the group can be identified as a major weakness. Since realists believe that, in the end, states are only looking out for their self-interests, it can be assumed that internal differences within the Quad will lead to further weakening and possible dissolution of the cooperative forum.

To summarize, it can be stated that realist arguments can explain the intensifying geopolitical competition between the United States and China. The Quad is in the middle of these competing interests and it can be presumed that geopolitics is binding these states together. In this way, based on realist assumptions the Quad is supposed to form a stronger, possibly military alliance. The shared geopolitical concerns of all the members are the main reasons behind this. On the other hand, the attitude of China that is driven by its own security concerns makes the Quad weaker. If the Dialogue would not have such a strong conflictual stance towards Beijing, the alliance might be able to redefine itself and create a more substantial cooperation.

All things considered, geopolitics and realism pit the whole Quad against China. The following two theoretical approaches and the subsequent discussions aim to explore the areas and theories that set the members of the QSD apart.

### **3.2. IPE approach**

The field of International Political Economy (IPE) is just as important as International Relations (IR) when it comes to analyzing international affairs and processes. Economics plays a very small, if any, role in most IR theories, which is a theoretical ‘hole’ that IPE aimed to fill. The theoretical approaches within this field of study observe the relationship between politics and economics, highlighting the influential effects of the latter on the former (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019). Economic reasons play a considerable role in the Quad-China relationship, as mentioned in the choice of theories section of the Methodology. The following subchapter will outline the major characteristics of the chosen theories of hegemonic stability and rational choice. The latter is not a strictly economic theory, however, its assumptions can be understood in the context of economy and trade, making its inclusion necessary. After the description of these approaches, the second subchapter will apply them to the case of the Quad, outlining economic reasons that weaken the dialogue.

#### **3.2.1. The hegemonic stability theory and the rational choice theory**

Before introducing the hegemonic stability theory (HST), it is important to briefly summarize its origins and place in the field of IPE. The three main classical theoretical approaches of IPE are mercantilism, economic liberalism, and Marxism. Out of these, mercantilism is the one that had the strongest effect on the future development of HST. Mercantilism can be understood as the IPE version of realism, because it sees economic relations between states as conflictual. Economics is considered as a zero-sum game: one state’s benefit is another one’s loss. The aim of economic activity is to enhance the power of the state, and it is completely under the control of politics (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019). The hegemonic stability theory itself belongs to the group of more contemporary approaches of IPE. The theory was developed concerning one of the major debates among scholars in this field of study. The debate is about the nature of power and the relationship between politics and economics as it relates to it (Ibid., 2019).

The hegemonic stability theory (HST) incorporates elements of both realism and liberalism while focusing on the relationship between political power and economy. According to HST, the creation and subsequent maintenance of the liberal and open economic order can only be possible with the help of a hegemonic power (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019). Specific rules and regulations are the most basic building elements of this framework and based on a realist argument: the hegemon is the only one who could set and later uphold these rules. The political and economic might of this power is required for the enforcement of the regulatory framework. The fact that this open and free economic system ideally benefits all the participants (not only the hegemon) adds a liberal argument to the theory. HST was developed primarily by the works of Charles Kindleberger and Robert Gilpin (Ibid., 2019).

Kindleberger claimed that an able and willing liberal hegemon is indispensable to the economic world order. Without it, disorder would set in and a phase of heightened economic rivalry would follow between the states, characterized by protectionism and isolationism. The ability of the hegemon to perform this regulatory task is not enough because it needs the willingness, as well, to take up this leading role (Kindleberger, 1973). This problem can be observed during the Great Depression. The United States already possessed the traits of such a power, but its isolationist policies illustrated its lack of eagerness to fulfill its role. The situation changed following the end of the Second World War when the US became the main architect of the Bretton Woods economic system (Ibid., 1973).

Kindleberger attempted to identify the reason behind the need for a hegemon. According to him, the liberal world economy is considered to be a public good that is available to everyone. From the moment it is supplied, it can benefit all of its participants; in this case, elements of the economic order, such as the freedom of markets or currency systems. The necessity of a regulatory hegemon arises because of the public nature of this good. States can use this system without contributing to it, so the task of the hegemon is to make sure this 'abuse' does not happen by, for example, penalizing those that do not contribute to it (Kindleberger, 1973).

In the liberal argument of Robert Keohane, the necessary power resources of the hegemon to successfully complete its tasks are not only militaristic in nature. While military power is fundamental, four other types of resources are needed. These economic resources include the control over raw materials, capital, markets, and advantage in the production of high-value products (Keohane, 1984).

The theory of hegemonic stability was further developed by Robert Gilpin. In the history of the economic world order, the 1970s were characterized by economic crises and the attitude of the US underwent some changes as well. The hegemon became more self-centered and protectionist policies were implemented once again. In Gilpin's view, this showed that the US was taking advantage of its position by exploiting the system while ignoring its supposedly benign role (Gilpin, 1987). Despite the fact that the end of the Cold War heralded a new era for the liberal hegemony of the United States, concerns remained. Realists and liberal scholars within IPE have been debating whether the liberal world economy can survive without the hegemony of the US (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019).

The rational choice theory by itself is a social theory and not an actual IR approach. Thus, it does not make assumptions about specific trends and processes of international affairs. Instead, this theory aims to describe a framework in which the actors have already established predilections that they want to maximize in accordance with the existing restraints (Barnett, 2017).

The core idea of the theory is that foreign policy decisions can be understood by analyzing the level of individuals. Politicians, decision-makers, and bureaucrats are believed to make their choices based on rationality and self-interest. They are aiming to maximize their benefits while keeping in mind the constraints of the system they operate in. Thus, by following the rational choice, the best possible outcomes can be achieved. This idea can be applied to other fields, such as economics, politics, or any other sphere of social life. The choices made by these individuals can be recognized in the foreign policy decisions of their state (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019). Based on this approach, states are capable of realizing the problems they face and therefore make the right foreign policy decisions by considering the costs, benefits, risks, and any other relevant aspects or consequences of the specific course of action. The foreign policy decision-making model of the Rational Actor Model or RAM is based on this theoretical approach. By not making specific assumptions, this theory is suitable for analyzing any kind of policy or decision; making it applicable to complex situations (Ibid., 2019).

### **3.2.2. Theoretical discussion: The relevance of economic ties?**

Economic ties and trading relations play a huge role in the Sino-American conflict. It can be assumed that they are among some of the major reasons why the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is unlikely to ever fulfill a NATO-like role in the region. China represents the biggest



trading partner to the members of the Quad, while the economic influence of the United States has been waning in the Western Pacific in recent years. Barack Obama's 'Pivot to Asia' foreign policy directive was accompanied by an economic initiative, as well. The Trans-Pacific Partnership would have proven to be a substantial step towards a free trade regime between America and Asia, but once elected, Donald Trump withdrew the US from the partnership. On the other hand, China has been constantly increasing its economic might and influence in the Indo-Pacific region through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Australia, Japan, and India are closely connected economically to China, thus their firmer alignment with the United States in security matters is a potentially troublesome issue. Choosing between traditional security relations with the US and economic ties and investment opportunities with China is a difficult choice for all these states. The following theoretical discussion aims to show that China has the upper hand in this matter.

The hegemonic stability theory can be used to explain the decline of American influence in Eastern Asia and the Pacific and the growing influence of China. The basic assumption of the HST about the need for a hegemon to uphold the liberal economic order can be seen in the United States' post-Second World War activity. The US accepted the mantle of its hegemonic role and used it to create the Bretton Woods economic system that benefited all its participants (Kindleberger, 1973).

Kindleberger claimed that without a hegemon to maintain the economic order, states would return to protectionist policies. In the last few years, as the United States waged trade wars with rivals and allies alike, implementing protectionist measures, Kindleberger's statement seems to prove true. The fact that resorting to isolationism was done by the hegemon itself, makes the situation even more dire (Kindleberger, 1973). The architect of HST also claimed that the hegemon must be willing to fulfill its role, its mere capabilities are not sufficient (Ibid., 1973). During Trump's presidency, the United States was clearly not willing to fulfill its 'hegemonic duties'. The abandonment of the Trans-Pacific Partnership was an obvious sign of this reluctance. In the meantime, China took advantage of this situation and increased its effort to become a hegemon in its own sphere of influence. The attitude of the US during those years draws parallels with the Great Depression. In both cases, protectionist policies prevailed over the acceptance of hegemonic responsibilities.

Treating the liberal economic order as a public good makes it obvious that someone must be capable and willing to guarantee it (Kindleberger, 1973). From the perspective of the United

States, it can be perceived that China has been striving to take on the role of this system's guarantor, while the US was 'away'. Today, the Biden Administration is likely to attempt to return to the original status quo, before the Trump presidency. However, changing the current situation and the economic influence of China in the region is a near-impossible task at this point.

Following the argument of Robert Keohane, it can be assumed that China has been striving to achieve a hegemonic status and is on its way to acquiring all the necessary power resources. In recent years, Beijing has been building up its military, but also its economic might. Raw materials, capital, and markets are clearly in the possession of China, while the emerging hegemon is also making progress when it comes to high-value products through technological advancement (Keohane, 1984).

Gilpin's analysis about the attitude of the US throughout the economic crises of the 1970s shares similarities with today's situation. Economic hardships are present today, as well, largely due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic and the Trump Administration only turned more self-centered, than before (Gilpin, 1987).

The rational choice theory, although less directly, can be applied to the case of the Quad. As the theory claims, individual foreign policy-makers are driven by rationality and a clear idea of what is beneficial for them and their state. Thus, foreign policy decisions of countries can be traced back to the level of individuals and by analyzing their opinions we can learn a lot about the policies themselves (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019). This approach can be used for all spheres of social life, so it can be recognized behind economic and political matters, as well. The assumption can be made that the members of the Quad: Australia, Japan, and India would favor their economic ties with China. If they would take a firmer stance towards Beijing on security matters, their economic well-being would pay the cost. Based on rationality, these states might be more inclined to protect these economic relations for the sake of their populations, instead of embarking on a warpath with their largest trading partner. Personal reasons may play a role, as well. Based on the rational choice theory, the decision-makers might also worry about their status and political standing if they were to make a controversial decision (Ibid., 2017). These three states might deem strengthening their military alliance with Washington, in the form of the Quad, as a very high price.

On the other hand, the same rational choice theory can be used to argue for the importance of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. The leaders of the United States, India, Japan, and Australia can be driven by rationality when it comes to the Quad. All of the members have certain issues with China, whether it is geopolitical, economic, or ideological in nature. The Quad itself can be interpreted as the cooperative forum of these four states, which was created out of rationality that was realized in the form of their shared concerns regarding China's activities.

In summary, it can be said that economic and trading relations between the members of the Quad and China are making a stronger cooperation less likely. A strengthened military-security cooperation amongst the Quad would cause China to 'punish' its economic partners and that is something that these states do not wish to happen. The hegemonic stability theory can prove that the United States has abandoned its leadership role and thus its hegemonic status is in question. China is seen as striving to take over this role and its economic leverage on members of the Quad is already weakening the Dialogue. The rational choice theory can also solidify this argument. Economic stability comes before military alliances when the security of the states is not directly threatened. The following chapter will explore the role of ideas in this conflict by describing constructivism and applying it to the case.

### **3.3. Constructivist approach**

Constructivism is a social theory that has become increasingly influential after the end of the Cold War in the field of International Relations. The constructivist approach highlights the importance of ideas and values in the construction of social reality and structures. Its application to IR puts the emphasis on norms and ideologies and their role in shaping foreign policy and international affairs in general (Barnett, 2017).

The members of the Quad, as well as China, have different, sometimes contrasting values and norms. This can be identified as a major weakness of the Quad, which makes the inclusion of the constructivist approach necessary. Firstly, constructivism as a social theory will be described, followed by its application in the field of IR. After introducing the relevant theoretical assumptions, a discussion subchapter will explore the presence of constructivist ideas in the case of the Quad.

### **3.3.1. Social constructivism and constructivist IR**

Constructivism can be understood as two different kinds of theory. Primarily, it is a social theory and secondly a collection of IR theoretical approaches. Social theories make more general claims and observations about the nature of social reality and how we understand it. These type of theories affect the whole field of social science, and their influence can be observed in various fields, including politics, economics, and sociology. On the other hand, IR theories make more specific observations about the way international politics is conducted by states, and trying to understand the causes and the consequences of them (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019).

As a social theory, constructivism is mostly interested in the role of ideas and thoughts in the creation of the social world. Constructivists believe that our social reality is first and foremostly constructed by ideas, shared beliefs, and norms, while material factors only play a secondary role. Human consciousness is believed to be the driving force behind the structures of this world, so their existence cannot be observed without analyzing the ideational background behind them (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019). Material conditions are present in the system, but the way they are perceived and utilized is up to the individuals who create and operate them. Thus, constructivism can be contrasted with positivism, which claims that we can understand a system by analyzing its material components, using scientific methods. According to the ideational view of constructivists, the way states perceive one another is more important than their respective material capabilities, such as the military or economic might. The physical assets that constitute social structures are driven and organized by shared understandings and beliefs between the humans that build them (Ibid., 2019).

Due to the fact that ideas play a key role in this social theory, a categorization of its types can give a deeper meaning to the concept. According to the constructivist scholar, Nina Tannenwald, four different kinds of ideas exist and influence our social world. Shared belief systems or ideologies are a collection of beliefs that express the necessities and wishes of a group of people (e.g., nation, state, religious group) (Tannenwald, 2005). Normative beliefs can help determine what is considered rightful and what is wrongful. Based on causal beliefs, one can determine the necessary means to fulfill the achievable goal. Lastly, there are policy prescriptions that elaborate on how to solve specific problems and they play the central role in policy-making (Ibid., 2005).

Another major concept of IR was thoroughly analyzed by constructivists: the concept of power. Four distinct types of power were identified by Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall. The most 'brute' form of power is the compulsory one, via which one actor can force its will on another one (Barnett & Duvall, 2005). Institutional power is more subtle, the interests of one state can be guaranteed and expanded via some international institution that affects other states. Structural power enables the buildup of capacities, for example through the capitalist economic order. The ability of a state to change the meaning of something and alter the general knowledge about a specific topic requires productive power (Ibid., 2005).

Following the description of social constructivism and its concepts of ideas and power, the constructivist IR theories that are the most relevant to the topic of the thesis, will be presented.

Alexander Wendt is one of the most influential constructivist scholars and is known for laying the groundwork for future contributors to the expanding literature of constructivist IR. His concept of international relations takes its theoretical departure from anarchy. Anarchy is believed to be the natural condition of the international system according to realists. Wendt agrees with this assumption, however, he draws very different conclusions from it. Based on constructivist thinking, anarchy does not necessarily force the members of the international system to fight amongst each other. While some states indeed might resort to violence in the name of self-defense, it is not the only path (Wendt, 1992). Realists consider the identity and the major interests of a state to be fixed even before engaging in relations with other countries. Wendt claimed that identities and interests are not predetermined, instead they are created and formed during interactions with other states. Their ideas and beliefs about each other can change throughout time and their official policies are likely to follow these changes. That is why amity and enmity are not fixed characteristics of transnational relations, they can be changed over time. Material conditions are only secondary, one's military might does not necessarily lead to fear and mistrust amongst one's neighbors. Constructivist thinking thus compels researchers to analyze the social interactions of states and the way they are perceived in each other's public opinion in order to describe the nature of anarchy (Ibid., 1992).

Wendt expanded his constructivist theory of IR in 1999, by introducing the 'cultures of anarchy'. This concept was based on the idea that anarchy can be interpreted and used in different ways by all states. Three different cultures were identified by Wendt in his work: the Hobbesian, the Lockean, and the Kantian culture (Wendt, 1999). The Hobbesian anarchy can

be characterized by the mutual feeling of distrust and enmity among states. Their relations are conflictual and the members of the system are constantly fighting in order to secure their survival. In the Lockean culture of anarchy, states are rivals. They are able to cooperate on certain matters, and their willingness to wage wars against each other is restrained. However, real cooperation and trust-based relations are only possible in the so-called Kantian culture. States have friendly relations, wars within their community are impossible and in case of an outside attack, the state in need can count on the support of others (Ibid., 1999). These different cultures also can be divided based on their 'degree of internalization'. The commitment of the members to shared norms, ideas, and principles can range from weak to strong commitments (Wendt, 1999).

Another important contribution to constructivist IR was granted by Peter Katzenstein. He claimed that the identity of a state, as well as its norms and political culture, play a role in major foreign policy decision-making areas, such as matters of national security (Katzenstein, 1996).

### **3.3.2. Theoretical discussion: Quad as a value based community?**

The role of ideology, norms, and the perceptions of states about each other was identified as the third major problem area for the Quad. Shared principles and ideological closeness are a vital part of a successful cooperation. The ideational component behind the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is the democratic nature of the member states' political systems. In a way, the Quad aims to incorporate the democratic powers of the Indo-Pacific region. However, this whole approach can be criticized on multiple accounts. First of all, the Quad does not involve all the democratic countries in the region, possibly the most notable exception being South Korea. Secondly, the respect for democratic values and norms is not shared to the same extent in all the members of the QSD. More recently, India has been accused of violating the rule of law by antagonizing its Muslim population. The United States also faced criticism, as racism and white supremacy have become bigger issues since they were not addressed appropriately during the Trump administration. The US, which is the driving force behind the Quad, also lost a lot of its global standing and respect in the international community in recent years. All these examples aim to show that the ideational foundations of the Quad are weakening and that can be just as important as economic dependence on China when analyzing weaknesses in the Quad.

Considering the fact that ideational differences play a huge part in the weakness of the Quad, it is important to apply constructivist arguments to the case. Constructivism as a social theory claims that ideas are constituting our social reality, because they confer meaning to the material factors. Even though material elements are present in the international system, they are created and used by the ideas, common concepts, and principles of the actors operating them (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019). The field of politics and IR is affected by these ideas and analyzing them is a crucial part of understanding certain events and foreign policy decisions of states. Thus, social constructivism can explain why normative differences are present within the Quad and why these differences are making a stronger cooperation unlikely at the moment (Ibid., 2019). The way Australia, India, and Japan perceive the United States and China are not the same. Different historical experiences and their respective relations all affect how these states see each other today. While the US sees China as a security threat, India might have a different perspective. Changing ideas of each other and contrasting perceptions are thus affecting the unity of the Quad.

Constructivist IR can also be applied to the topic of the thesis. Alexander Wendt's theoretical approach about the nature of anarchy can serve as an explanatory factor. His main claim is that anarchy does not mean states are forced to have conflictual relations since he believed that the interest and the identities of the states are not predetermined. Their identities are formed through interactions with others, thus they can change over time between amity, enmity, and in between (Wendt, 1992). Since material conditions are only secondary, the competition between China and the US does not necessarily mean that the other members of the Quad have to choose a side. Some material factors drive them towards stronger military cooperation with Washington, while others highlight the importance of economic ties to Beijing. Based on constructivism, the way these states perceive the two competing powers is more important than the material conditions in which they find themselves (Ibid., 1992).

Another important theoretical concept by Wendt that can be used in this case is the cultures of anarchy. Clearly, for a successful security alliance, the Kantian culture of anarchy is the necessary international setting (Wendt, 1999). A trust-based security community can only form in the Kantian culture. However, the Quad can not be described as a group of countries characterized by this culture. To a certain extent, there are still disagreements and disputes among the members, so the most suitable description would put the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue somewhere between the Lockean and Kantian cultures. While the answer is most

likely closer to the Kantian one, the degree of internalization is still debatable. The commitment of these states to their shared ideas and norms are not entirely the same; some are weaker than others (Ibid., 1999).

Peter Katzenstein's constructivist theory claims that the identity of a state influences all matters of its foreign policy, including the questions of national security (Katzenstein, 1996). His assumption can also be recognized behind the foreign policies of the Quad. The general political identity of these states might lead them to be less inclined to side with the United States or simply choose any side. Neutrality and pacifist policies are assumed to play a big part in this dilemma.

Based on this theoretical discussion, it is clear that constructivist arguments contribute to the weakness of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. The members have different political cultures, state identities, and perceptions about one another, as well as towards China, thus achieving unity is a near-impossible task at this point. At the same time, it must be emphasized that change plays a huge role in constructivist IR. Over time, the ideological differences might disappear, while the perspectives on China and the US can shift as well. The constructivist approach serves to highlight a weak point of the cooperation today, but it does not rule out the possibility of changes in the future.



## **4. Analysis**

In the following chapter, a set of quantitative and qualitative data will be described and analyzed in order to verify or falsify the claims of the theoretical discussions. The presented news, speeches, official statements, statistical data, and academic articles will be organized in five main subchapters. Three of these subchapters reflect the identified problem areas, as well as the chosen theoretical perspectives. Prior to the analysis of these specific areas, an additional introductory subchapter is presented that aims to compare the Quad to NATO, based on the concept of security communities. After the analysis of the aforementioned problem areas (geopolitical conflicts, economic and trading relations, and the level of ideological closeness) a case study will be included that aims to incorporate all three theoretical approaches regarding an issue that involves the whole Quad.

### **4.1. Quad as a NATO-like security community?**

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue has been compared to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the idea that the Quad might become a NATO-like organization has been theoreticized. However, this path seems very unlikely at the moment. As it will be elaborated, despite the shared geopolitical concerns of the Quad members, there are still considerable differences that serve as major obstacles on its path towards becoming an 'Asian NATO'. The comparison made between the Quad and NATO makes it necessary to briefly summarize the historical evolution of the transatlantic alliance. The institutionalized nature of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization also makes it important to define the concept of a security community. The relevance of this concept in the thesis is based on its accuracy in describing NATO while highlighting the deficiencies of the Quad at becoming one.

NATO was created on the 4th of April, 1949, with the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty. The alliance that initially involved the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxemburg, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, and Portugal, was born amidst the escalating Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union. The transatlantic security community was founded for three main reasons. The primary purpose of the organization was to contain and deter any possible Soviet aggression and expansion in Europe. Besides forming a security umbrella over Western Europe, NATO also served to guarantee that nationalist

militarism would not push the continent into another World War. The third main purpose was the advancement of the political integration of Europe (NATO, 2011).

During the Cold War, the collective defense clause (Article 5) and the strategy of 'Massive Retaliation' guaranteed that the main purpose of NATO was fulfilled: the containment of the Soviet Union. Other states joined the organization in subsequent years and the mostly military agenda started to expand, thus taking on a political role as well. 'Massive Retaliation' was exchanged by the doctrine of 'Flexible Response' and this flexibility played a key role in the later history of NATO. When the Soviet Union collapsed and the Cold War ended, it was this flexibility that enabled the organization to renew itself (NATO, 2011).

In the post-Cold War era, NATO faced new threats to the security of the transatlantic community. The ethnic conflict in Yugoslavia was one of the first new challenges for the alliance. The events of 9/11 and subsequent terror attacks across the world put counter-terrorism operations and the fight against religious and political extremists on NATO's agenda. The organization expanded its focus to more distant countries, such as Afghanistan or Iraq, due to the transnational nature of the new security threats. New members joined the organization, peacekeeping and later peacebuilding missions became a part of NATO's functioning, incorporating not only military but also political elements. The flexible and institutionalized nature of the alliance enabled the continued relevance of it even today, despite challenges and questions about its legitimacy (NATO, 2011).

Security community, as a concept, appeared in more than one IR theory. In the area of sociological liberalism, Karl Deutsch analyzed transnational relations and ties between different societies (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2019). He claimed that if the ties between societies are strong, that means they are more likely to conduct transnational relations in a peaceful manner. This way a 'security community' can emerge among these countries, forming a region where disputes can be solved without resorting to the use of force. Mutual interests, increasing communication, and strengthening economic relations characterize such a community, and the example offered by the author is the North Atlantic region (Deutsch et al., 1957).

Another major school of thought that deals with the concept of security communities is social constructivism. According to Alexander Wendt, security communities are social structures, where the participating actors share the idea that they do not pose a risk towards one another and that force is an unnecessary tool for conflict resolution (Wendt, 1992). Wendt's categorization of the three 'cultures of anarchy' also links to the idea of security communities.

In the third, so-called Kantian culture, states have peaceful relations amongst each other and they support one another in case of an attack or threat by a third party (Wendt, 1999).

Based on the historical evolution of NATO and the presented theoretical descriptions of security communities, certain conclusions can be drawn regarding the Quad itself. While some of the traits that characterize security communities are present in the Quad, they are not as strong as they are within NATO. To begin with, transnational relations are not as strong in the Indo-Pacific region as they are in the North Atlantic. Mutual interests exist, however not regarding all the issues. Shared security concerns about China are an example of this, however, there is no agreement on how to deal with the situation. Strong economic relations that characterize NATO are not present within the Quad. Since China is the largest trading partner to all these states, the economic relations among themselves are not sufficiently deep (Deutsch et al., 1957). Alexander Wendt's cultures of anarchy can highlight another major difference between NATO and the Quad. The Kantian culture is the one that enables the creation of a security community, like NATO. However, the Indo-Pacific is not yet characterized by such a culture. The sometimes cooperating, but usually competing states that are common in the Lockean culture are better suited to describe this region. The ASEAN serves as an example of a successful regional cooperation, but that does not mean that the wider region can be described as Kantian culture (Wendt, 1999).

Overall, it can be said that the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue still has a very long road ahead if it aims to become similar to NATO. The following three subchapters will prove this assumption by highlighting the shared interests, but also exposing the weakening factors related to the Quad.

#### **4.2. Geopolitical aspects in the Quad-China relations**

The main assumption regarding the area of geopolitics in the theoretical discussion was that it serves as a catalyst for a stronger military alliance. Realist arguments were used to strengthen this idea. Based on neorealism, from the perspective of the United States, China's growing presence in the Indo-Pacific must be contained with the help of the Quad. On the other hand, China can see the Dialogue as an attempt of the US to achieve global hegemony, by curbing China's influence in the region. The following subchapter will list some empirical data that aims to support the theoretical discussion and prove that geopolitics and realist arguments bind the Quad together. To create a clear and balanced picture, the analysis will look at all the actors

involved in this question: the United States, Japan, India, Australia, the Quad as a whole, and China.

The United States, which is the strongest military power in the Quad, is assumed to be driven by defensive realist thinking. In its strategic competition with China, the relevance of the Indo-Pacific region increased, as well as the importance of Quad. The official documents presented below, as well as recent events, aim to prove that the US has a strong interest in deepening the military-security alignment with its partners in the region.

The Biden-Harris Administration issued an *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* in March 2021. This document identifies the main objectives of American foreign policy, the means to achieve them, the challenges and problem areas to be solved, and the overall place of the United States in today's world order. The main goal of the Biden Administration is to secure the interests and well-being of the American people (The White House, 2021c). The primary foreign policy goals of the US include increased awareness and cooperation against pandemics; reversing the effects of climate change; stepping up against terrorism; countering cyber threats; addressing the problem of rising authoritarianism; and advancing democratic values worldwide. While analyzing the global security landscape, the document highlights the shifting distribution of power and identifies China as a threat due to its assertiveness. Beijing is recognized as a competitor who is capable of using its political, economic, and technological powers to challenge the current international system (Ibid., 2021c).

To successfully deal with the threat of China, the United States is aiming to fulfill its leadership role in the international system once again via organizations like the United Nations and by reinforcing its alliances. Australia, Japan, and India are mentioned specifically for their strategic role, while the Indo-Pacific region is described as a vital area to the national interests of the US. (The White House, 2021c).

President Biden's speech during the virtual summit of the Quad, held in March 2021, is another strong indication regarding the intentions of the US. Coordinating the members' vaccination efforts against the Covid-19 pandemic and addressing the issue of climate change were highlighted as their most immediate goals. China was not mentioned specifically, but the Quad was identified as a forum that will grow in significance in the coming years (The White House, 2021f).

The ever-present maritime disputes regarding the South China Sea intensified in the first few months of the Biden Administration. American and Chinese aircraft carriers were sent to the region in April 2021 as the conflict escalated. The US held joint naval exercises with the Philippine navy, signaling their support towards the security of the Philippines. This ASEAN member is not the only state whose maritime territories are claimed by China as its own (Lendon, 2021). Even more alarming for Washington is the pressing situation of Taiwan. Beijing is becoming less and less subtle in its intention of reunifying Taiwan with mainland China. In recent months, through naval exercises around the island and warplanes crossing over the airspace of Taiwan, China signaled that forceful reunification is not out of the question. At the same time, the US reaffirmed its commitment to the security of the democratic island (Ibid., 2021).

Based on the presented data, it can be concluded that geopolitical tensions are rising between the US and China. The US's desire to strengthen the Quad fits into the defensive realist narrative. To secure its international position and curb China's attempts at regional and possible global hegemony, Washington bolsters its regional alliance system, in which the Quad plays a key role.

Japan, one of the United States's longest-standing allies in Eastern Asia, has been a firm supporter of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. Due to the geographical proximity to China, Japan has been experiencing its neighbor's increasingly assertive foreign policy firsthand. The following data aims to prove that Japan is invested in the strengthening of the Quad since it has serious concerns about China's geopolitical aspirations in the East China Sea.

In February 2021, the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Motegi Toshimitsu conducted a telephone call with the American Secretary of State, Antony Blinken. During their discussion, both sides agreed to work together towards creating a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific', as well as strengthening the relationship between their states, India and Australia. Japan voiced its concerns about China's activity in the East China Sea and the Coast Guard Law (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2021).

The significance of the American-Japanese alliance was also evident when Japanese Prime Minister, Suga Yoshihide, became the first foreign head of government to visit President Biden in Washington. In the official statement, issued following the visit, on April 16, 2021, the two parties emphasized the continued importance of their cooperation. The United States stressed its continued commitment to the security of Japan, under the *U.S.-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security* (The White House, 2021g). The Senkaku Islands were specifically

mentioned as being under the jurisdiction of the Treaty. China's heightened activity around the islands and its unlawful claim to them can explain the relevance of the statement. China was also blamed for disrupting the rule-based international order and using economic coercion to achieve its goals in the region. Japan also expressed its concerns about other areas of Chinese aggression, such as the South China Sea, the Taiwan Strait, Hong Kong, and Xinjiang. It became clear that strengthening the Quad was a shared intent of President Biden and PM Suga (Ibid., 2021g).

The passing of China's new Coast Guard Law in February 2021 caused fear and additional concerns among Beijing's maritime neighbors. The ability of the Coast Guard to use force against foreign ships if they entered China's *jurisdictional waters* is alarming due to its vagueness. Since China considers parts of the East China Sea as its territory, the new legislation is creating even more tension surrounding the Senkaku Islands, one of the disputed areas in the region (Kawashima, 2021).

The above-presented data confirms that Japan is under growing geopolitical pressure from China in the East China Sea. As a firm supporter of the Quad from the beginning, these recent concerns are only likely to strengthen the commitment of Japan towards aligning its military security with other members of the Dialogue.

India, the most populated democracy in the world, has its share of geopolitical troubles with China. The two giants have engaged in armed skirmishes along their shared border, in the Himalayas, in recent years. Furthermore, China's 'Maritime Silk Road' initiative involves India's sphere of influence: the Indian Ocean itself. At the same time, India and China are both members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the BRICS group. While India's commitment to the Quad might not be as firm as Japan's, its joint naval military exercises with the US, the Malabar, show that their security ties are still significant. The following data aim to prove that in terms of geopolitics, India shares the concerns of the other Quad members regarding China.

President Biden and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi conducted a telephone call in February 2021. During that call, both leaders agreed to cooperate more closely against the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as against the harmful effects of climate change. The shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific region was highlighted, along with the freedom of navigation and the respect for territorial integrity. The heightened role of the Quad was mentioned, as well, during the conversation (The White House, 2021b).

In February 2021, a Quad Ministerial Meeting was held online between the ministers of foreign affairs of the participants of the Dialogue. Their shared commitment towards upholding the rules-based international system, the freedom of navigation on seas, and strengthening their maritime security, among others, was highlighted. Although China was not mentioned directly, the previously mentioned measures can be interpreted in that context, due to China's recent activities on the East and South China Seas (Ministry of External Affairs - Government of India, 2021).

The previously described facts prove that India supports the Quad, however, they are not singling out China as much as the United States or Japan. On the other hand, there are visible geopolitical tensions between India and China that must be mentioned.

Unlike Japan, India's disputes with China are not primarily about their maritime territories. The two political giants share a border in the Himalayas and their geopolitical competition is concentrated in that area. Disputes and conflicts have occurred in the past decades regarding the area, but 2020 turned out to be an especially violent and conflict-ridden year for Chinese-Indian relations. The past year saw multiple low-scale armed confrontations and clashes along the disputed border, and the possibility of a wider conflict did not seem like a far-fetched idea at the time. At the height of tensions, both sides amassed a considerably large amount of military troops in the region (Markey, 2021). Even though the conflict de-escalated by early 2021, both sides remained vigilant of each other's activities. The border region of Ladakh continues to be a disputed land and a source of geopolitical tension between China and India. Their conflict was visible in other areas, as well, such as India's deployment of one of its warships to the South China Sea in June 2020 and the cyberattack orchestrated by Chinese hackers in October 2020 that led to an electrical blackout in Mumbai (Ibid., 2021).

Australia and China have had a rather turbulent relationship in recent years and the current political and diplomatic tension between the two sides is only likely to increase in the near future. In terms of geopolitics, Australia is less affected by China's activities, but Canberra's close ties to the members of the ASEAN, as well as its strategic partnership with the United States, puts them on a collision course with Beijing.

In a phone call between President Biden and Prime Minister Scott Morrison, in February 2021, the two leaders emphasized the vitality of the US-Australian alliance. Other than climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, China was mentioned as a challenge to be tackled together by their cooperation (The White House, 2021a).

These official statements are not reflecting entirely the severity of the Australian-Chinese conflict, however, an overview of recent developments can help create a clearer picture. Australia has always struggled finding the balance between its security ties with the United States and its strong trading relations with China. Since the 1990s the economic partnership with China was gradually expanding, even though there were political disturbances even at the time. The Howard Administration's support towards the US, in 1996, regarding Taiwan caused considerable diplomatic tension with China (Ryan, 2020). Despite events like this, China became Australia's largest trading partner. During the years of President Obama's 'Pivot to Asia' initiative, Australia became more hostile towards China. Concerns were raised about China's activities on the South China Sea, and at the same time, their economic influence started to become problematic. Australia began to perceive Chinese investments as threats to its national security. The relations took a serious downturn in 2020 when Australia called for an international investigation into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic. China reacted by raising tariffs on Australian imports, which caused considerable damage to Australia's economy. The trade war exposed Canberra's vulnerability to China's economic might (Ryan, 2020).

The worsening trade and diplomatic fight between Canberra and Beijing reached a new low in April 2021. Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne announced the cancellation of a major investment project between the state of Victoria and China. The proposed trade deal was part of China's Belt and Road Initiative and the news of the cancellation sparked discontent on China's side (Westcott, 2021).

To summarize, it can be said that Australia is less affected by China's growing geopolitical influence, but its one-sided dependence on China's economy is concerning for the country. Australia's withdrawal from the first version of the Quad has shown that their commitment is not as firm as other members. Today, the continued economic dependence raises the same questions, although the outcome might be different due to the worsening diplomatic ties between Australia and China.

China's disdain towards the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue can be exemplified with Zhao Lijian's press conference on March 15, 2021. When the Foreign Ministry Spokesperson was asked about the earlier online meeting of the Quad in March. In his answer, Lijian claimed that using China as a threat was only a tool for disrupting regional ties. While not calling out the United States by name, the spokesperson maintained that 'certain countries' are believed to be



strengthening the Quad driven by a ‘Cold-War mentality and ideological prejudice’ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2021).

As for the perspective of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue regarding the geopolitical challenge posed by China, the joint statement of its leaders can be used to underscore their views. After their virtual meeting in March 2021, President Biden, PM Modi, PM Suga, and PM Morrison issued a statement, titled, ‘The Spirit of the Quad’ (The White House, 2021e). While China itself was not mentioned as a security threat, there were multiple references in the document towards the challenge it poses. Freedom of navigation and territorial integrity are mentioned as driving principles of the Quad. The most direct reference to China was through the East and South China Seas. The members stressed the importance of collaborating to uphold the maritime order of these areas, referencing China’s growing power in the region (Ibid., 2021e).

While China is not directly mentioned in the above-mentioned document, the fact, that a joint statement was issued by the leaders of the Quad is a strong indication. The creation of working groups regarding vaccination, emerging technologies, and climate change can be contrasted with China’s similar efforts. Even though their shared geopolitical concerns are not given a strong voice, the existence of such concerns is visible in the background, strengthening the legitimacy of the Quad (Pankaj, 2021).

Based on the data presented above, it can be stated that the geopolitical concerns of the Quad members are, indeed, making their cooperation more important. In the latest meeting of the QSD, the joint statement that was issued, and the newly created working groups are all indicators of a strengthening alliance. The competition between the United States and China is easily explained by changing power differentials and the Quad itself also fits into the defensive-offensive realist narrative. The members of the Quad all share concerns about the growing Chinese influence in the region. While the defensive realist argument of building alliances against an emerging hegemon explains this process, not all members are equally invested in it. At the same time, China’s stance can also be explained by its fear of growing American hegemony in its own region. The Quad is still in the process of defining its role and responsibilities. Each of the four members have their own political agendas and interests, which can change quite swiftly. The uncertainty surrounding the Dialogue’s purposes pushes China into the spiral of the security dilemma. Overall, it can be stated that realism and geopolitics are fuelling the tension in the Indo-Pacific, as well as creating a common ground for all the

members of the QSD. However, economy and ideology must be analyzed as well, since the respective theories describing them are likely leading to different outcomes.

### **4.3. Economy and trade: growing Chinese influence**

The main assumption, drawn from the theoretical discussion of the IPE approach, was that the members of the Quad are less likely to strengthen the alliance due to close economic ties with Beijing. While all the members share a certain amount of geopolitical concerns towards China in the fields of economy and trade, their interests diverge from the United States. Concurrent trade conflicts between China and the US, as well as between Beijing and Canberra are complicating the situation, however, the economic ties in the region are still vital. As it was elaborated in the theoretical discussion, the hegemonic stability theory and the rational choice theory are likely to drive Japan, India, and Australia towards cooperating more closely with China, the possible new guarantor of public goods. The data described in the following subchapter will aim to highlight the strength of China's economic relations with all the Quad members. The relevance of these trading ties will stress a major weakness of the Quad: the lack of substantial economic partnership between them, and especially across the Pacific Ocean.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) would have been an ambitious trade deal between the United States and other 11 states within the Asia-Pacific region. President Barack Obama announced the participation of the US in the TPP in November 2009. The primary goal was to increase economic growth by boosting American exports into the region. The involved countries along the Pacific Rim are responsible for nearly 40% of the global GDP. The TPP was destined to be the main pillar of the Obama Administration's economic policies. The deal would have enabled the freer flow of manufactured products, services, and agricultural goods (Office of the United States Trade Representative, n.d.).

The TPP negotiations were finished by October 2015, and a comprehensive trade deal was achieved between Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, United States, and Vietnam. The agreement granted greater access to markets by reducing or completely canceling tariffs and other barriers and thus, enabling freer trading in goods and services. New investment opportunities and jobs would have contributed to cross-border integration. Developmental efforts and trade capacity building were also among the main goals of the deal. The TPP was expected to become a new platform for the economic integration

of the Asia-Pacific region (Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2015). Two years later, upon the election of Donald Trump and his Cabinet, the United States withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2017).

The TPP would have been a central part of President Obama's 'Pivot to Asia'. Other than generating economic growth and creating jobs, the trade deal would have contributed greatly to the strategic political interests of the US. The United States aimed to use the trade deal to reinforce its alliances in Asia while countering the economic presence of China. After the withdrawal of the United States, the remaining parties created a new, slightly altered deal, called the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). Today, the Biden Administration is considering rejoining the deal, only in the event that certain rules were changed (McBride, Chatzky, & Siripurapu, 2021).

While the previous example of the US-abandoned TPP shows how Washington refused its economic leadership role during the presidency of Donald Trump, China has been expanding its economic role in the region. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as well as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), are the two main examples of this process.

In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the launch of a series of interconnected development and investment initiatives, thus expanding the economic influence of Beijing. Inspired by the ancient Silk Road, the initiative envisaged a Silk Road Economic Belt and a Maritime Silk Road, which together constituted the One Belt, One Road (OBOR). The OBOR was later renamed to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that we know today (Chatzky & McBride, 2020). The plan involves a vast amount of railways, highways, and pipelines that aim to create stronger economic connections between China and the involved countries. The network of the BRI reaches Southeast Asia, the Central Asian region, and also East Africa via the Indian Ocean. Other than the economic benefits of finding new markets and investment opportunities, China is driven by a geopolitical agenda, as well. Solidifying its economic and political presence worldwide can be understood as an answer to Obama's 'Pivot to Asia' (Ibid., 2020). The plan of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is especially alarming for states like India, which voiced its opposition to the BRI. In New Delhi's view, the BRI is going to indebt the participating countries, thus creating leverage for China over them. The previously described TPP was an attempt by the United States to engage with the region economically and counter the BRI (Chatzky & McBride, 2020).

In November 2020, China further increased its economic power by signing the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). This deal does not create a free trade regime like the TPP intended to achieve, but it certainly contributes to the regional trade integration of Asia (Kurlantzick, 2020). The 15 signatories include Northeast and Southeast Asian states alike, bringing these two regions closer in an economic sense. What makes the RCEP significantly alarming for the United States is that three of its main allies in the region are also among the signatories of the RCEP: namely, Japan, South Korea, and Australia. The removal of tariffs and other measures of the agreement are not as comprehensive as a free trade agreement, but they still show that China created a huge trading area that incorporates some of the major economies of the world (Kurlantzick, 2020).

The *Summary of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement* on the website of the RCEP highlights the main features of the deal. The text emphasizes the deeper economic engagement of the ASEAN with the other signatories, namely China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand. Together, these states produce 30 percent of the global GDP. The *Summary* describes the main Chapters of the Agreement, dealing with trade in goods, services, customs procedures, investments, and many other topics (RCEP, 2020).

Statistical data about the major trading partners of Quad members, in 2020, can also prove the economic dominance of China. Japan, despite being a long-standing US ally, imports only 11% of its goods from the United States. At the same time, Japan imports 26% of its goods from China, over twice as much as from the US. When it comes to exported products by Japan, the percentages are more balanced, but the United States still serves as the secondary destination with 19 percent, while China accounts for 22%. Australia's economic dependence on China becomes obvious when observing its trading data. Twenty-nine percent of all imported products arrive in the island nation from China, while the United States is the second source, with 12 percent. The difference is even more staggering in the share of exported products. Thirty-six percent of the share in value in Australia's exports goes to China, while only 5% to the US (International Trade Centre (ITC), 2020). The most recent data regarding India are from 2019, but the numbers prove the same point there as well. China accounts for 14 percent of their imports, while the United States accounts for only 7%. On the other hand, the primary exporting destination for India is the United States (17 percent), while China is only the third (5 percent), right after the United Arab Emirates. The United States, itself, also has very strong economic ties with China, despite the competition and Trump's trade war. Even in 2020, China was the primary exporter of products to the US, with a share of 19 percent. The other members of the

Quad were much lower in the US list of countries from which it imports goods: Japan was fourth and India eleventh. On the other hand, only 9 percent of American exports are directed to China, making it the third export destination, following Canada and Mexico. Japan comes in fourth with 4 percent, while India is the 13th, and Australia is only the 16th (International Trade Centre (ITC), 2020).

Based on the previously described data, it can be stated that the assumptions made in the theoretical discussion regarding the hegemonic stability theory and the rational choice theory are proven to be correct. As mentioned in the aforementioned discussion, the United States has been the hegemonic power that created and upheld the liberal economic order after the Second World War. While this order took serious blows in recent years, inflicted by the Trump Administration, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, it persists. The difference is that today, the role of the United States has been filled by China in the Western Pacific region. The examples of the abandoned Trans-Pacific Partnership and the trade wars proved that the US is no longer willing to guarantee a free trading regime for the region. The TPP would have constituted a public good, something that could have benefitted the entire Pacific Rim. With the withdrawal of Washington, these states were left to create this public good by themselves in the form of the CPTPP. Since the HST links the leadership role in the economic system to hegemonic status, the decision of Donald Trump to withdraw from the TPP also meant the loss of the hegemonic role. At the same time, this argument can be used to support the claim that China can now be considered the new hegemon in the region. With its increasing economic power, Beijing created the BRI, as well as the RCEP more recently. These two initiatives, as well as the statistical data regarding China's role in global trade, proves that China became the guarantor of public goods for the Western Pacific and thus, for the members of the Quad, as well. By taking on this mantle, China became the hegemonic power, as well, at least in a regional sense.

The rational choice theory can be applied to this case, as well. The economic dominance of China in the Indo-Pacific region makes the members of the Quad dependent on Beijing. Although this dependence is not affecting all the countries equally, it is still present in each case. The statistical data about trade, unequivocally, proves this point. Based on the rational choice theory, the members of the Quad cannot allow themselves to take a firmer stance against China since the economic well-being of their respective populations depend on it. The example of Australia, alone, can prove this point. After Canberra demanded an investigation into the

origins of the COVID-19 pandemic, China reacted by raising tariffs on Australian products. A political move prompted swift economic retaliation from China. Rationality can lead to two possible conclusions. One of them is the previously described scenario, in which the Quad's economic dependence on China deters its leaders from turning against Beijing. The other scenario is that exactly because of rational decision-making, the Quad will become stronger. Its participants realize that their shared concerns about China make their firmer commitment to the cooperation necessary. Other than the present geopolitical tensions, the serious economic dependence on China is a cause for alarm. Australia's 'punishment' for the proposed international investigation might lead the members to reevaluate their relationship with China. India's unwillingness to join the RCEP can also be perceived as a rational choice. Its fear of growing Chinese economic influence can easily be understood as the reason for its decision.

To summarize, it can be said that the economic and trading ties that link the members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue to China are very substantial. This fact, together with the much weaker economic role of the United States, makes the Quad a less efficient alliance. The hegemonic stability theory and the rational choice theory are both helpful in proving that the economic role of China is interconnected with a stronger political position. This position can be used by Beijing to deter Australia, Japan, and India from strengthening their alliance with Washington. At the same time, there are signs of trouble for China's economic dominance. India's conflictual stance towards the BRI and the RCEP, as well as Australia's trade conflict with Beijing are already showing cracks in the system. Only time will tell whether these cracks will lead to a weakening of China's economic power or if these issues are just temporary problems.

#### **4.4. Ideological and normative differences inside the Quad**

Constructivism necessitates the observation of underlying ideas and principles behind the decisions of international actors, as well as, the processes of global politics. Thus, analyzing the ideological 'situation' of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue can also shed more light on its weaknesses and strengths. The main normative framework that links the members of the cooperation together is their shared commitment to democratic norms and values. This aspect of the Quad is highlighted in its official statements, as well as in the other name of the cooperation: the Democratic Security Diamond. However, there are clear differences within the Quad that question the ideational closeness of the group. The strength of democratic institutions

in the respective countries are not necessarily the same. For example, recent concerns about the state of democracy in India is an alarming sign. The United States is also facing problems on the same front. The four years of the Trump Administration harmed the international standing of the US to a great deal. The ‘America First’ foreign policy direction led to disputes with rivals and long-standing allies alike. The traditional allies of the US have an understandably hard time trusting Washington after Trump's turbulent years in office. The events that transpired at the end of his presidency, such as the attack on the Capitol, undermined the faith of many in the strength of American democratic institutions. For the aforementioned reasons, a deeper look is necessary into the political cultures of the Quad members to highlight the problematic points and the normative differences between these states.

Freedom House is a non-profit non-governmental organization (NGO), which researches each country's level of democracy, civil liberties, and human rights. This NGO releases yearly reports about the adherence of each state to these values and ‘grades’ them based on the actual domestic situation. Since the Quad was founded upon the cooperation of four democratic states, observing the data of Freedom House can help determine the validity of the Quad's joint commitment to democracy and the rule of law.

Australia's score in 2020 was 97 out of 100, which clearly puts the country in the ‘Free’ category, among others with strong democratic institutions. The electoral process, the plurality of the political system, and the transparent functioning of the government point towards a healthy democratic system. The associational and organizational rights of the citizens are also granted. While Australia can be considered as a fully democratic state that respects the rule of law and human rights, three specific and problematic issues can still be observed (Freedom House, 2021a). In the category of the ‘free and independent media’, Australia only scored 3 out of 4. This lower point can be traced back to some questionable raids conducted by the federal police, such as the one at the office of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in 2019. The other two issues deal with the equal treatment of all segments of the population and the freedom from economic exploitation. Groups, such as Aboriginals, Torres Strait Islanders, and LGBT+ people faced certain levels of discrimination and mistreatment. Refugees and asylum seekers are still being placed in detention centers with inadequate living conditions (Ibid., 2021a).

The Freedom House report on India shows a considerably worse picture in 2020, compared to its fellow Quad members. With an overall point score of 67 out of 100, India is placed in the ‘Partly free’ category of states. The previous year's score was 71 and the decline into the partly

free status occurred since then. The scores of both political rights and civil liberties deteriorated in the past year, and the freedom of the internet was an issue that affected its score (51 out of 100). The Hindu nationalist government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi can be seen as a contributor to the rising discrimination and violence against the Muslim minority (Freedom House, 2021b). While basic political rights are guaranteed, political participation and pluralism are not. Insurgencies in certain areas are obstructing the local people to make their political choices freely. The Muslim population is constantly facing obstacles in their attempts at reaching adequate political representation. The transparent functioning of the government is also threatened by unreported cases of corruption, thus showing the weakness of safeguards. Disinformation, defamation campaigns, and the harassment of journalists are only some of the examples as to why the existence of a 'free and independent media' can be seriously questioned (Ibid., 2021b). The ability of the Muslim people in India to freely practice their faith is also threatened by rising Hindu nationalist sentiment, which is believed to be fuelled by PM Modi himself. Thus the constitutionally granted freedom of navigation and the secular nature of the Indian state are violated. India also gained lower 'grades' in the areas of academic freedom and the freedom of assembly. In addition, the free operation of nongovernmental organizations has also been curbed. The rule of law is another important democratic principle that can be criticized in India. Politicization and rising corruption have affected the judiciary in recent years, while marginalized groups of the Indian society have been left unprotected from discrimination. Personal autonomy and individual rights are also areas in which India is producing worse results than other members of the QSD (Freedom House, 2021b).

Similar to Australia, Japan has also received a high score (96) that puts it in the 'Free' category (Freedom House, 2021c). Political rights and civil liberties are widely respected in the country, however certain problems remain in the latter category. The slightly lower score of civil liberties can be attributed to ethnic and gender-based discrimination, as well as the closeness of the government and the business sector (Freedom House, n.d.).

In the year 2020, the United States also saw a decline in its democratic scores. While still considered as 'Free', the overall score of the US dropped to 83 out of 100, compared to a score of 86 in 2019. With this number, the fourth member of the Quad is clearly ahead of India, but behind Australia and Japan. The democratic system of the US can be criticized on multiple accounts. Some of the events of 2020 underscore the severity of the situation. Misinformation regarding the coronavirus outbreak, spread by President Trump as well, seriously jeopardized



the handling of the pandemic throughout last year (Freedom House, 2021d). The impeachment trials of the president and subsequent acquittals, despite the condemning information, are also proof of the eroding American democratic institutions. The murder of George Floyd by the police and the ensuing series of protests, known as the Black Lives Matter movement accentuated the enduring problems of systemic racism and police violence. The last months of the Trump Administration also led to alarming anti-democratic events, such as the president's refusal to concede, the spread of conspiracy theories about the election, and the attack on the United States Capitol in January 2021. These events can explain the declining scores that the United States received in the latest Freedom House reports (Ibid., 2021d). When it comes to political rights, the US lost points in the electoral process, in political pluralism and participation, as well as in the functioning of the government. The open and transparent operation of the government can be highlighted as a problematic area, receiving 2 points out of 4. Civil liberties were also harmed in recent years, such as the violations of press freedom, and the freedom of assembly (police violence against protesters). On the topic of the rule of law, the US also received bad scores, due to the questionable independence of the judiciary and the unequal treatment of various segments of the population (Freedom House, 2021d).

The international standing of the United States, as a responsible partner and ally, has been undermined severely in recent years. The Administration of Donald Trump and the 'America First' foreign policy directive made the US into a unilateralist, isolationist power. The withdrawal of the United States from multilateral forums and international agreements, as well as the diplomatic and economic feuds with the oldest allies of the US, did great harm to the global standing of the country (Patrick, 2021). Trump's erratic foreign policy affected the Euro-Atlantic alliance, as well as the major allies of the US in Asia, like Japan and South Korea. In these four years, the allies of the US were forced to deliberate their futures without the protection and partnership of America. Today, the idea of 'strategic autonomy' is contrasting the newfound commitment of the United States to multilateralism. The Biden Administration, and especially the Secretary of State, Antony Blinken is aiming to rebuild the fractured alliance system of Washington (Ibid., 2021). Combating climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the rising authoritarianism in the world are among the main foreign policy goals of the US. Biden wishes to rebuild the trust with America's partners to achieve these goals through multilateral cooperation. This task is not an easy one. At this point, it is hard to say whether or when the allies of the United States will trust Washington again (Patrick, 2021).

The data presented above can be used to support the arguments of the theoretical discussion. As constructivists claim, ideas and beliefs have a fundamental effect on the conduct of international relations. States' perceptions about each other can easily change through their interactions and the way they think about one another is more important than the material conditions that exist between them. The changing perceptions towards the United States can illustrate this point. Despite the fact that all members of the Quad have long-standing alliances with Washington, recent events have harmed their relations. The sort of confrontative foreign policy that was used in the previous four years led to a loss of trust towards the US. Even though the current administration is attempting to change this view, they still have a long way to go. The perceptions of Australia, India, and Japan might inevitably make them allies with the US, however, they might still be influenced by the bad memories of Trump's years in office. These shifting opinions can be identified as a weak point for the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. If the US were to change its tone towards its allies once again, they would have to reevaluate their security and economic interests.

The general political cultures of these states can also be considered a possible weakness. The pacifist nature of Japan's constitution might hinder its ability to follow a more confrontational foreign policy. Australia has been struggling with its dual commitments, namely the traditional security ties to the US and the economic dependence on China. India's history as a member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) also makes it hard for them to 'choose a side' in the Sino-American conflict.

Other than the changing perceptions of the Quad members and their respective political cultures, their democratic institutions also shed some light on the differences. As the Freedom House data suggests, these states are not at the same level of democracy, even though the driving principle of the Quad is exactly their shared democratic commitment. While in name, the Quad incorporates the four major democratic states in the Indo-Pacific region, it is clear that the reality is different. India's democratic scores keep getting downgraded, putting the leading South Asian power in the group of partly free countries. Australia and Japan both have strong democratic institutions, but they also have problems to solve and unfortunately room for democratic backsliding. The United States, although free, received lower points compared to Japan and Australia, showing that the US itself is not immune to authoritarian tendencies and populism. These differences in the levels of their democratic systems can prove that the Quad is not yet an example of Kantian culture, in which successful international cooperations can

thrive. While there is common ground and an ideational element that links these states together, the internalization of their commitment to democracy is not adequately strong at the moment. Overall, it can be said that there are still normative differences within the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, such as the respective strengths of their democratic institutions; their distinct political cultures; and the relatively bad international reputation of the United States, which primarily resulted from its policies from the past four years. However, as constructivists argue, ideas can and do change over time. These ever changing notions can affect international relations based on them. Today, the Quad still faces ideational controversies and issues, but the situation could easily change even under a relatively short span of time.

#### **4.5. The case study of the COVID-19 pandemic**

While the previous three subchapters analyzed the identified problem areas of geopolitics; economic relations; and ideological differences; this chapter will describe a case study that clearly affects every member of the Quad, as well as China. The case is the COVID-19 pandemic, which put the QSD to a test and has serious consequences on the whole Indo-Pacific region. After the description of data regarding the handling of the pandemic by the Quad, all of the previously described theoretical approaches will be applied in the discussion, pinpointing the strengths, as well as the weaknesses of the group.

The coronavirus pandemic quickly turned into a global challenge: one that has created a health crisis that still ravages the world. Besides its toll on global health, it has led to severe economic and political consequences. The pandemic affected the Sino-American competition, just like any other sphere of international affairs. Today's worsening COVID-19 situation in India and Australia's economic 'punishment' by China following its call for an investigation into the origins of the pandemic are two major examples of how the pandemic affected the Quad. For the quadrilateral cooperation, the crisis appeared as a challenge, as well as an opportunity. The efficiency and legitimacy of the Dialogue depended on how the situation was handled. The joint statement of the Quad leaders and the fact sheet that was issued after their meeting in March aimed to show how the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue responded to the crisis.

The *Quad Leaders' Joint Statement* that was released after the virtual summit, held on March 12, 2021, already has been described earlier in the Analysis. It is imperative to stress here the emphasis placed on the COVID-19 pandemic in the document. The pandemic is identified as

one of the primary global challenges, on par with climate change and security issues. The goal of shared vaccine manufacturing and distribution is realized in the statement. Equitable vaccine access for the whole Indo-Pacific region and cooperation with the WHO and COVAX are high on the agenda of the QSD (The White House, 2021e).

Another document that can be analyzed regarding the handling of the pandemic by the Quad, is the *Fact Sheet: Quad Summit*, which was also released after the virtual meeting of its leaders in March 2021. This document summarizes the exact areas in which the Quad must cooperate by setting up working groups that deal with the various issues. The three groups thus reflect the priorities of the QSD, namely dealing with the effects of the pandemic, climate change, and emerging technologies. The main roles and tasks of these working groups are listed in the document (The White House, 2021d). While the creation of the Quad Critical and Emerging Technology Working Group and the Quad Climate Working Group are substantial steps towards strengthening the Dialogue. The most important result of the meeting was probably the launch of the Quad Vaccine Experts Group. The group involved scientists and government officials alike from all the Quad members. Their main tasks include designing an implementation plan for the vaccination: pinpointing the possible obstacles; coordinating with financiers and producers to achieve large-scale distribution; sharing information regarding COVID-19 responses; and supporting the activity of organizations like WHO, COVAX, and ASEAN on this matter (Ibid., 2021d).

The Quad Vaccine Partnership aims to speed up their vaccine manufacturing and distribution and assisting the vaccination efforts in the whole Indo-Pacific. The partnership includes the commitments of the United States, India, Japan, and Australia and how they can contribute to the vaccination process. While India is responsible for expanding its vaccine manufacturing efforts, the other Quad participants promised their financial and logistical support (The White House, 2021d). Financing and providing loans were primarily assured by the US and Japan, while logistical and delivery support was undertaken by Australia. Other than these measures, the Quad expressed its will to help the region by preparing the health workforce, countering misinformation, and increasing immunization capacity, as well as other issues (Ibid., 2021d). The creation of the Vaccine Experts Group and the whole plan of the Quad for the handling of the pandemic is a huge step for the Dialogue towards becoming a more substantial and relevant alliance. These experts and working groups are taking the QSD one step closer towards institutionalization (Sharma, 2021). While stronger military cooperation is high on the Quad's

agenda, coordinating their vaccination efforts is currently the most important task. The economic dependence of the region on China is obvious through its vaccine diplomacy and that is why the Quad is aiming to offer an alternative for Southeast Asia. Diversifying the supply chains help the Quad take on a new economic role (Sharma, 2021).

Looking at the response of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue to the COVID-19 pandemic from a theoretical point of view, different assumptions can be made. Following a realist argument, the efforts of the Quad to become an alternative source and distributor of vaccines is just another way for the United States to compete with China. Since realism considers every aspect of international relations as a possible arena of confrontation, it is easy to assume that vaccine distribution is one of them. China's vaccine diplomacy can be seen as another tool of Beijing's soft power in the eyes of Washington. Treating China's activities on this matter as a way of expanding its influence and power in the Indo-Pacific region, it is a logical step for the US to counter these moves. Driven either by defensive or offensive realist reasoning, both China and the United States are seeing vaccines as a tool for furthering their interests. Based on realism, the self-interested goal of power-maximization is behind China's and the US's efforts at manufacturing and delivering vaccines for the region.

In an economic sense, a different picture can be drawn about the situation. COVID-19 vaccines are public goods that presently benefit everyone and they are desperately needed by many states. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and, indirectly, the US can be seen as striving for the hegemonic role of the international system. Based on the hegemonic stability theory, the hegemon is responsible for guaranteeing the public goods for the other states and the Quad Vaccine Partnership fits into this narrative. Providing such a crucial public good, like vaccines, the Quad is taking on a more constructive role for the whole Indo-Pacific region. Rational choice also can be identified behind the actions of the Quad. Understanding the health risks of the pandemic is only part of their motivation. The economic dependence of the region would only deepen, in the case were such that China was the only one they could count on in their fight against the pandemic. Thus, by diversifying the vaccine supply chain and offering an alternative, the QSD is also driven by political and economic reasons rooted in rationality.

Constructivism offers an additional perspective into this case. For the Quad to be an effective and substantial international alliance, it needs to prove its value to the whole region and the world. Coordinating their efforts to help the vaccination of not only their respective countries but also Southeast Asia, is an essential step in earning positive international recognition.

Proving that they are more than a militarized anti-China coalition, as Beijing claims, they must change this perception.

To summarize, it is apparent that the handling of the coronavirus pandemic by the Quad strengthened the group's position. The Quad Vaccine Partnership can be understood in the context of the Sino-American competition driven by geopolitical, economic, or ideological reasons. Whatever the reasons are, the pandemic offered an opportunity for the Quad to take on a bigger, more relevant role in the region, without directly antagonizing China.

## **5. Conclusion**

The future role of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is still uncertain. It is clear, however, that the informal cooperative forum has multiple paths ahead. Whether the Quad will turn into a more influential, institutionalized organization or slowly fade into irrelevance is still an open question that depend on a number of factors. As the importance of the Indo-Pacific region is rising, so does the necessity of the Quad to define its role and mission more clearly. As the Sino-American competition is accelerating, the QSD's place in the regional architecture is becoming more relevant. While the security forum has been compared to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or at least a forerunner of such an institution in the Indo-Pacific, there are several obstacles ahead of the participants on such a path.

Throughout the thesis, the aim was to answer the research question, namely why it is difficult for the members of the Quad to create a viable international alliance in the Indo-Pacific. In order to answer the question, the areas of geopolitical tensions, economic relations, and ideological differences were analyzed with the help of IR and IPE approaches. The main weaknesses and strengths of the Quad were identified in the theoretical discussion and verified in the empirical analysis. First of all, the comparison made between the QSD and NATO must be elaborated. While it has been theorized that the Quad will eventually become some sort of 'Asian NATO', currently this path can be disproven. Today, the Quad is certainly not a security community, unlike NATO, which has very strong political and economic ties within the organization. The shared democratic culture and the high degree of institutionalization also make NATO a good example of a security community. On the other hand, the Quad does not have all the necessary attributes of such a community at the moment. The group is only making its first steps towards institutionalization and the adequate level of political and especially

economic ties are missing. Even though the Dialogue is a long way from becoming the collective security organization of the Indo-Pacific, it is possible that one day it will fulfill such a purpose. The joint naval exercises and the willingness to tackle shared issues, like climate change or the coronavirus pandemic, collectively, are positive developments for the Quad.

To become an effective and influential part of the regional architecture of the Indo-Pacific, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue must prove that it is a viable international alliance capable of dealing with common issues. Within the three main problem areas, specific weaknesses and strengths were identified and analyzed. The area of geopolitics has proven primarily to bring the Quad together. While Australia does not have direct security concerns about China's growing military activity in the region, Japan, India, and the United States via its alliance system, all do. For Japan, the East China Sea and more specifically the Senkaku Islands are the main geopolitical tension points with China. For India, it is the shared border with China in the Himalayas. The United States has its concerns due to its presence in Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines, as well as the precarious situation of Taiwan. Through the freedom of navigation and the relevance of the South China Sea due to trading lanes, even Australia is affected indirectly. While these shared geopolitical concerns serve to strengthen the Quad, the other two problem areas are responsible for its weaknesses.

The economic dependence of these states on Beijing, through intensive trading relations, is weakening the alliance. China became the primary guarantor of public goods for the region, shown by its role in vaccine development and distribution. The shrinking economic presence of the US in the Western Pacific is driving Australia, Japan, and India towards closer cooperation with Beijing, exemplified by the RCEP and the BRI. While the lack of substantial economic ties and trade within the Quad is a weakening factor, a change can be observed. India's unwillingness to participate in the RCEP and its criticism of the BRI show that New Delhi's disputes with Beijing extend to the sphere of the economy, as well. Australia's growing political hostility towards China and the subsequent trading retribution that was inflicted on the Australian economy is another sign of trouble. Despite these events, China is still the most influential economic partner in the Indo-Pacific region, undermining the Quad's attempts at becoming an alternative.

The ideational foundation of the Quad is another point of fragility. The strength of democratic norms and institutions in the respective states are varying, while the trust towards American

leadership evaporated in recent years. The different political cultures within the Quad are making their cooperation weaker and less effective. The case study of the Quad’s response to the coronavirus pandemic has shown that the group is capable of addressing shared challenges and issues. While the effectiveness and substantiality of the Quad Vaccine Partnership are not guaranteed yet, the creation of the working group itself is a big step for the Quad towards becoming a successful cooperation.

<i>The strengths and weaknesses of the Quad</i>			
	<b>Geopolitical tensions</b>	<b>Economy and trade</b>	<b>Ideology and perceptions</b>
<b>Strength</b>	Shared concerns about the rise of China		
<b>Weakness</b>		Economic dependence on Beijing	Different levels of democracy, Bad reputation of the US
<b>Exceptions</b>	Australia is not directly affected	India's hostility towards the BRI and the RCEP	

Based on the abovementioned summary, the research question of the thesis can be answered. For the members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, it is difficult to strengthen their cooperation and create a viable international alliance because of diverging economic interests and ideational differences. All of the four participating states have strong economic and trading ties with China, while the same can not be said about the United States or among themselves. Their economic dependence on Beijing is thus weakening the alliance’s chances at closer cooperation since they do not have an adequate level of economic relations within the group. The withdrawal of the US from the TPP and the isolationist policies of the Trump Administration only worsened this situation. The other major weakness of the Quad was identified in the members’ differentials at the level of their democratic institutions. Democratic backsliding in India and populist tendencies in the United States weakened the trust in the



strength of their democracies. Most of Donald Trump's foreign policy decisions contributed to the decreasing global standing of the US as a trustworthy ally. The different political cultures of these states is another weakening factor.

While these economic and ideational differences question the unity of the Quad as a successful cooperation of democracies, some factors serve to strengthen the Quad. The shared geopolitical concerns are clearly one of these, and the economic differences of India and Australia with China must be noted as well. The ongoing coronavirus pandemic offered an opportunity for the Quad to prove its worth, but the results of this 'test' are not yet visible. At the moment, the viability of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue can be criticized and questioned on multiple fronts, but there are processes that can lead to a successful international alliance in the future.

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