

# QUAD TO ZERO?

FILIPINO PERCEPTIONS OF THE QUAD,  
THE INDO-PACIFIC, AND THE ALLIANCE SYSTEM

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# Executive Summary

This paper examines the perceptions of Filipino strategic studies analysts, practitioners, and officials regarding the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (known as the Quad) launched in 2017 and its attendant connection with the United States' Free and Open Indo-Pacific project. Based on an online survey of more than 200 Filipino respondents, it asked and gauged their attitudes toward the Quad and its relevance in the current regional strategic environment, as well as its impact on the Philippines' national security and defense policy and strategy. This paper also compared the results of our survey with existing surveys conducted by international think-tanks on the Quad and the Indo-Pacific.

The APPFI survey's main findings are: first, there is a small majority of respondents who are familiar with the Quad as a multilateral security arrangement. Second, among the respondents who are aware of the Quad, they mostly view it as a "counterweight" to China's increasing assertiveness in the Asia-Pacific. Third, there is the majority view that the Philippines can benefit from its participation in activities related to the Quad. Specifically, a majority of the respondents believed that the Quad can manage tensions in the South China Sea and contribute to the Philippine government's pursuit of an independent foreign policy. Finally, our survey revealed that while the Quad could potentially serve Philippine strategic interests, the respondents expressed caution that it may undermine ASEAN centrality and the ASEAN-led regional security architecture.

This paper argues that in general, variance of perceptions among Filipino security elites can be accounted for in two ways. First, disparities in Filipinos' reception of the Quad are symptomatic of the very ambiguities of the role of the arrangement in the U.S.' Asia strategy. Second, the varying

views of Filipinos stem from a deep knowledge of domestic politics, challenges related to long-haul strategy analysis, and biases related to trust and confidence in major powers such as China and the U.S..

Based on these findings, this paper recommends that the Philippines should put to good use the trust and confidence of Filipino security elites toward all Quad members to enhance its military modernization program. Another recommendation for the Philippines is to participate in the Quad's freedom of navigation activities while enforcing its sovereign rights through increased maritime patrols. For their part, the Quad members should be ready to step in and assist when asked by the Philippine government on matters related to maritime security and its other external security challenges. Finally, this paper recommends that the Philippines manage its expectations of the Quad as it seeks to strengthen its relations with the Quad members without inciting negative responses from China.



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# Quad to Zero? Filipino Perceptions of the Quad, the Indo-Pacific, and the Alliance System

Aries A. Arugay, Charmaine Misalucha-Willoughby,  
and Julio Amador III

## Introduction

In 2007, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue brought the United States, Japan, India, and Australia together in a loose security dialogue. The members of the Quad, as it has later come to be known, sought to strengthen each other's relative positions based on shared values and interests, particularly on maritime security from East Asia to the Indian Ocean. Despite its potential, the Quad suffered an untimely death when Australia withdrew from the association in 2008. Today, however, there seems to be an apparent connection between the revival of the Quad in 2017 and the formation of the United States Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy, which is especially prominent in the context of China's assertiveness in the region.

Such is the backdrop of recent surveys of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) and the ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute.<sup>1</sup> Both these surveys used purposive sampling and descriptive statistics disaggregated on a national level with respondents from academia, think tanks, civil society, governments and militaries, the private sector, international organizations, and the media. The ASPI survey analyzed understandings of the Quad and expectations surrounding it. Meanwhile, the ISEAS survey examined extant views on

regional developments and how members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) perceive great power relations in the region. The general mood of the region is pessimistic, according to the ISEAS survey, and this is likely due to the diminishing confidence on the U.S. as a strategic partner and provider of regional security. It is therefore interesting to see from the ASPI survey that despite this, there is widespread enthusiasm about the potential of the Quad to contribute to regional peace and stability.

This APPFI study takes the ASPI and ISEAS surveys as jump-off points and narrows the focus to Filipino strategic thinkers, scholars, and practitioners. We focus on their perceptions on the Quad and the arrangement's relevance to the current regional strategic environment, as well as its impact on the Philippines' national security and defense policy and strategy. We find some variance in Filipinos' perspectives, and here we argue that these can be accounted for in two ways. First, disparities in Filipinos' reception of the Quad are symptomatic of the very ambiguities of the role of the arrangement in the U.S.' Asia strategy. Second, the varying views of Filipinos stem from a deep knowledge of domestic politics, challenges related to long-haul strategy analysis, and biases related to trust and confidence in the major powers such as China and United States. Despite the Filipinos' enormous trust with traditional security allies, the prevalence of ambiguity in the Quad's core mechanisms and principles contributes to a misunderstanding of what the Quad is truly intended for. More notable is the fact that all four country-members of the Quad have strategic relationships with one another. We conclude by identifying implications for national security policy in the Philippines.

## **The Quad as an Ambiguous Strategy**

The FOIP is the current Asia policy of the United States. It first gained ground during U.S. President Donald Trump's inaugural five-country Asia tour in 2017 and was given more clarity during the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue. "Free" means freedom from coercion in the international level and the freedom to pursue good governance in the national level in terms of protecting and upholding fundamental rights, transparency, and anti-

corruption. “Open” refers to sea lines of communication and airways, on one hand, and infrastructure, trade, and investment, on the other. In short, the U.S. approach to the Indo-Pacific has at its core a focus on three areas: security, economics, and governance.

While the articulation of such an approach or strategy is welcome, several points need careful attention. First, in terms of security, the pursuit of a free and open Indo-Pacific rests on championing not only an interdependent and interconnected vision of the world, but also a rules-based international order. While not discounting that Quad members put a premium on the same goals and values, the FOIP presupposes strategic convergence amongst the four states. Strategic convergence might have been the case, were it not for China’s economic dynamism and influence. In fact, China is India’s most important trading partner, while Australia remains the second largest recipient of accumulated Chinese investment with US\$99 billion since 2008.<sup>2</sup> Japan’s aging population constrains it to be similarly dependent on China’s growth. These economic links constitute the Quad members’ hesitation towards the FOIP.

Second, these deep economic linkages are arguably the impetus for the reframing of the FOIP from its original focus on security to the recalibrated incarnation involving economic interactions. The updated version emphasizes that enhancing shared prosperity rests on creating partnerships, building momentum in energy, infrastructure, and digital economy, and tapping the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) to grow economic partnerships and strengthen people-to-people connections.<sup>3</sup> An alternative explanation to the recalibration is that a security-focused initiative is likely to be interpreted as a way of containing China. However, the focus on economics likewise raises the question of how this component works relative to other initiatives in the region, in particular China’s Belt and Road Initiative. Also, how can the Quad’s strong encouragement for regionalization and the focus on individual sector-specific efforts be sustained in light of the U.S.’ protectionist tendencies?

Finally, the conflation of the FOIP with the Quad is likewise problematic, coming on the heels of suggestions to shelve the Quad. U.S. Indo-Pacific Command’s Admiral Phil Davidson said that the region’s reception to the

Quad was lukewarm and that “there wasn’t an immediate potential” for it.<sup>4</sup> While his remarks might have been taken out of context and blown out of proportion, this is nonetheless symptomatic of the disconnect between the FOIP and its operationalization via the Quad. It is precisely these ambiguities, i.e., in terms of the security-economics nexus and the intersection of the FOIP and the Quad that diminish the potential impact of the U.S.’ new Asia strategy. These ambiguities spill over to Southeast Asian states and their respective bilateral relationships with the U.S.. Similarly, the vagueness of the FOIP raises questions about ASEAN’s role in the U.S.’ Asia strategy.

It matters that the U.S. Asia strategy is perceived in the Philippines as unsound, not least because of the Philippines’ longstanding alliance with the U.S.. This brings to the fore recent calls– led by the Secretary of Defense Delfin Lorenzana – to review the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT). To quote Lorenzana, “That’s the reason why the MDT needs to be reviewed because my forecast is that it’s the U.S. that will be engaged in a conflict first, not the Philippines.”<sup>5</sup> The defense secretary’s remarks highlight the strategic problem facing decision-makers: does the Philippines want to follow the U.S. in another conflict, given the former’s closer relationship with China and uncertainty regarding the U.S. commitment to its treaty ally? This is not to say that the Philippines is not committed to the alliance; the Duterte administration’s national security policy clearly states its belief that the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) signed by the two countries to implement the Mutual Defense Treaty would lead to “increased [U.S.] military presence for maritime and security operations.”<sup>6</sup> Clearly, however, Philippine security policy is ambivalent because the same policy document sees the U.S. security presence as a “stabilizing force” and describes the Trump Administration approach towards the region as something “that remains to be seen.”<sup>7</sup>

The ambiguities surrounding the FOIP have several implications that can be categorized in various levels of analysis. Despite calls to review the MDT, the alliance remains intact. This begs the question, however, of the sustainability of such an arrangement. One challenge to the longevity of the alliance is domestic in nature: how well can the alliance withstand President Rodrigo Duterte’s policy of pivoting towards China? Similarly,

how will the alliance be impacted by domestic policies in the U.S. and the 2020 elections? At the regional level, Southeast Asian countries need to not only define their role in the overarching FOIP narrative, but also to identify mechanisms to ensure ASEAN centrality. Will the upcoming 2019 ASEAN Summit result in a more proactive stance for the region? Hence, if the U.S.' Asia strategy is itself mired in inconsistency, then it is not surprising that it translates to diverging receptions in the Philippines and in the region. Another explanation has to do with Filipinos' deep knowledge of domestic politics, challenges related to long-haul strategy analysis, and biases related to trust and confidence in the major powers.

### **Filipino Perceptions on the Quad**

This section compares the results of three surveys conducted to gauge the opinions of security practitioners and scholars in the region. These are the ASPI and ISEAS surveys and the original survey conducted by the authors of this paper and now disseminated under auspices of APPFI. Our aim is to highlight points of convergence among the respondents (mostly international relations and security studies experts and specialists) as well as to underscore the similarities as well as differences between the opinions of the Filipino strategic community and those of their counterparts in the region.

We conducted an online non-random survey of Filipino members of the country's strategic "community" who are either public officials or members of academic and research institutions on security and defense. In particular, they comprise scholars, researchers, members of the civilian bureaucracy, and officials from government agencies with national security functions and responsibilities. We also have respondents who are middle-level officials from the security sector (military, police, coast guard, etc.). We sent the survey response requests through our existing networks within government institutions and think-tanks through email and social media. The survey ran from 1 March until 11 April 2019 and received 228 unique responses. Our non-random sample had a good balance between members of the security sector (55%) and the civilian sector (45%) that comprised the academe, civilian government officials and personnel, and members of the

private sector. Apart from demographic information of the respondents, the main survey revolved around gauging their attitudes and opinions over statements related to the Quad, the Indo-Pacific, ASEAN, and Philippine foreign and security policy.

Given that the ASPI and the ISEAS surveys presented descriptive findings, this study also presents its own descriptive findings. It identifies points of convergence as well as highlights important differences between the three surveys on three main themes: (1) awareness of and support for the Quad and its linkages with the Indo-Pacific concept, (2) the relationship between the Quad and regional players like ASEAN and China, (3) and expectations about the likely roles that the Quad will play in the region and their impact on regional security.

### **Awareness of and Support for the Quad and the Indo-Pacific**

From 276 respondents mainly from the ASEAN region, the ASPI study found general support for the Quad. Southeast Asian experts overwhelmingly support the Quad, with 51% expressing support, 39% being open to future support, and only 10% saying they did not support it. In particular, Filipino and Vietnamese experts displayed high valuation (e.g., support and optimism) of the Quad, compared to Indonesians and Singaporeans who appeared to be Quad skeptics primarily because of what they feel is a lack of clarity regarding the Quad's purpose and fears that its strong public image as part of China containment may fuel tensions.

The first question concerned awareness of the Quad's existence. While this was assumed by the ASPI study given that it sent its survey to those whom it considers as experts, we felt that this was a necessary question. Responses to this question already reveal that many members of the Philippine strategic community are *not* familiar with the Quad. While a majority of the respondents know about the Quad, 40% of those surveyed are not familiar with it. This seems to suggest that there must be a more diligent effort on the part of the Quad countries in reaching out to other important stakeholders in the Philippines and informing them about the idea behind the Quad and its possible role and contribution to regional security.

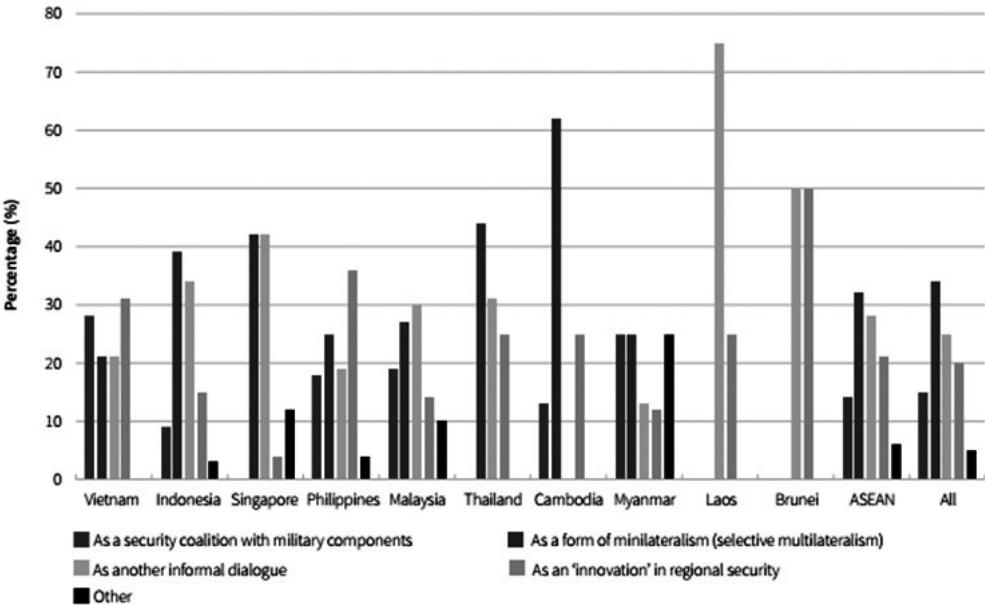
**FIGURE 1**  
Awareness of the Quad  
(APPFI Survey)

	<b>Aware*</b>	<b>Not Aware</b>
<b>Whole Sample</b>	60% (136)	40% (92)
<b>Affiliation</b>		
Academe	58% (25)	42% (18)
Government (Civilian Bureaucracy)	76% (32)	24% (10)
Government (Security Sector)	57% (72)	43% (54)
Private Sector	41% (7)	59% (10)
<b>Education</b>		
Bachelor's	55% (48)	45% (40)
Postgraduate	61% (11)	39% (7)
Master's	62% (64)	38% (39)
PhD	83% (10)	17% (2)
No Answer	(3)	(4)
<b>Training</b>		
Without training abroad	55% (61)	45% (50)
With training abroad	64% (75)	36% (42)
<b>Training by Country**</b>		
Australia	56% (19)	44% (15)
United States	65% (34)	35% (18)
India	50% (2)	50% (2)
Japan	67% (12)	33% (6)
China	67% (14)	33% (7)

\* Figures in percentages, followed by raw number of respondents

\*\* Some respondents had training across multiple countries

**FIGURE 2**  
The Role of the Quad  
(ASPI Survey)

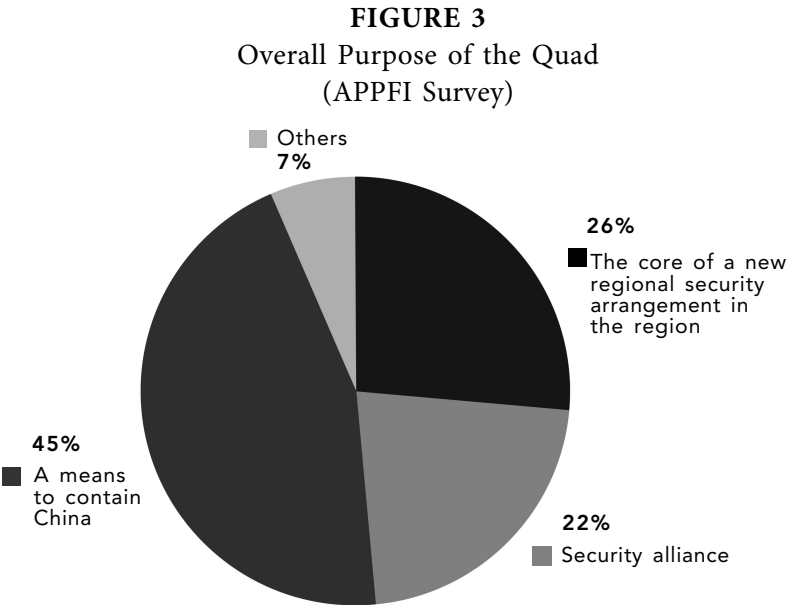


Source: Huong 2018: 14

The ASPI study found that support for the Quad is high among its respondents, the graph above shows that there is variation to the role that Southeast Asians ascribe to it. Most of the respondents view it as either a form of “minilateralism” (32%) or another form of informal dialogue among major powers. Our survey displays the same trend of variation with no consensus as regards the role of the Quad. While 4 out of 10 respondents see it as a means to contain China’s power, the others view it either as a security alliance between the four powers (Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S.) or as a core of a new regional security arrangement. In the future, we expect that this diversity of opinions regarding the role of the Quad in the region might likely persist unless there is more clarity about the Quad’s intentions as well whether it will further project itself in the region.



The ASPI study found that the Quad is important for (a) its diplomatic and symbolic value (39%) and (b) it being necessary for sustaining the regional power balance (33%). While respondents underscored that it is necessary for balance-of-power reasons, only 18% of them claimed that “it will become a critical initiative to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific,” which is telling of the sentiment that while experts acknowledge its necessity, they are not necessarily confident about the Quad actually becoming central to Indo-Pacific security (see findings below on doubts as to the lack of clear purpose for the Quad). Our Philippine findings reveal a much lower appraisal on the role the Quad can play in the regional security architecture, as only 26% of the respondents view it as forming the core of a new security arrangement in the region.



We also compared how the ASPI study viewed the Quad in relation to the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) concept. Respondents most frequently (40%) saw the Quad as complementary to the FOIP strategy regardless of whether it is integral or external to it. Only Vietnamese

respondents (55%) firmly asserted that the Quad is an integral part of the FOIP. For its part, the ISEAS study did not ask its respondents about the Quad but its findings reveal a similar vagueness toward the Quad and the Indo-Pacific concept. It found that support for the Indo-Pacific concept remains low among respondents (17.2%). An overwhelming majority (61.3%) view it as unclear and requiring further elaboration. Though it is worth noting that the Philippines is comparatively one of those with the highest rates of support for the Indo-Pacific project (26.4%), they are interestingly also comparatively the lowest when it comes to thinking about the Indo-Pacific concept as a means to contain China (17%), vis-a-vis the 25.4% population average for the whole of Southeast Asia.

**FIGURE 4**  
The Role of the Quad vis-à-vis the Indo-Pacific  
(ISEAS Survey)

Country	The concept presents a viable option for a new regional order	The concept will fade away	The concept is unclear and requires further elaboration	The concept aims to contain China	The concept could work to undermine ASEAN's relevance and position in the regional order
<b>Brunei Darussalam</b>	<b>17.8%</b>	<b>11.1%</b>	<b>66.7%</b>	<b>20.0%</b>	<b>22.2%</b>
<b>Cambodia</b>	<b>20.8%</b>	<b>16.7%</b>	<b>45.8%</b>	<b>37.5%</b>	<b>29.2%</b>
<b>Indonesia</b>	<b>24.8%</b>	<b>9.7%</b>	<b>62.8%</b>	<b>15.9%</b>	<b>12.4%</b>
<b>Laos</b>	<b>31.0%</b>	<b>3.5%</b>	<b>65.5%</b>	<b>6.9%</b>	<b>10.3%</b>
<b>Malaysia</b>	<b>13.3%</b>	<b>12.6%</b>	<b>64.3%</b>	<b>31.5%</b>	<b>24.5%</b>
<b>Myanmar</b>	<b>15.0%</b>	<b>12.6%</b>	<b>47.9%</b>	<b>24.6%</b>	<b>14.4%</b>
<b>Philippines</b>	<b>26.4%</b>	<b>9.4%</b>	<b>58.5%</b>	<b>17.0%</b>	<b>15.1%</b>
<b>Singapore</b>	<b>8.7%</b>	<b>15.0%</b>	<b>72.4%</b>	<b>34.7%</b>	<b>21.3%</b>
<b>Thailand</b>	<b>12.5%</b>	<b>14.3%</b>	<b>67.0%</b>	<b>27.7%</b>	<b>17.9%</b>
<b>Vietnam</b>	<b>18.7%</b>	<b>9.8%</b>	<b>60.2%</b>	<b>27.6%</b>	<b>12.2%</b>

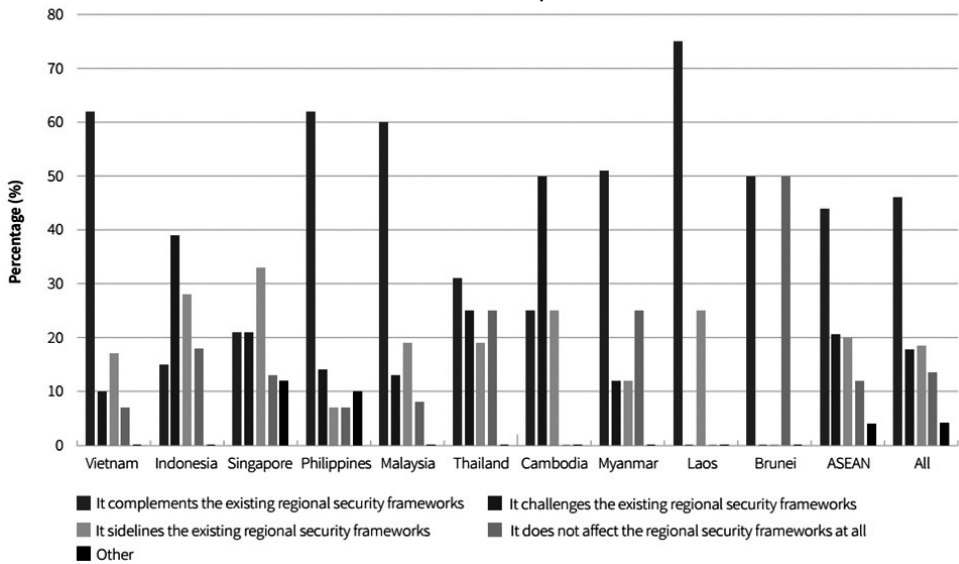
Source: Tang, et al. 2019: 25

While this survey did not really ask about the clarity of both concepts, we asked our respondents whether the Quad and the Indo-Pacific are the same. 6 out of 10 said that both projects are the “same” and they manifest the same institutional configuration. This might continue to be the prevailing view among Filipino strategic thinkers and practitioners unless the countries that are pushing for the Indo-Pacific concept provide more details. In the meantime, this finding resonates with the mainly “wait and see” attitude adopted by most stakeholders in the region.

### **Linkages Between the Quad and Regional Powers**

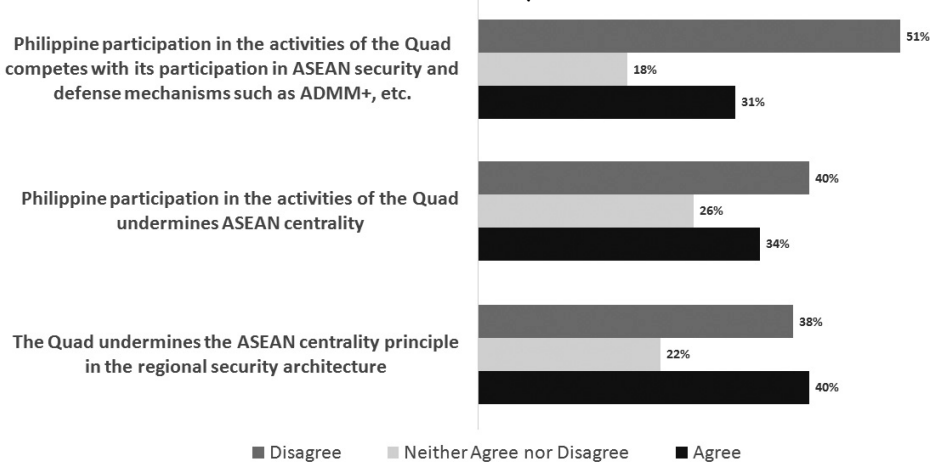
One of the main motivations of this survey is to know the perceptions of Filipino security experts on the impact of the Quad on the existing regional security architecture as well as to gauge their appraisal of the likely reactions of regional players (e.g., ASEAN and China) towards the Quad. The ASPI study spent a considerable amount of attention in discussing this theme. It found that “the majority of those who emphasize the Quad’s challenge to ASEAN and ASEAN-centered architecture are often citizens of non-ASEAN states”. This view is not prevalent among ASEAN citizens in their survey; most of those viewed the Quad as complementary to existing regional security frameworks (44%). ASPI noted that such a view is in fact more pronounced among Filipinos, Vietnamese, and Malaysians (above 60% if disaggregated per country).

**FIGURE 5**  
The Quad and Existing Regional Security Frameworks  
(ASPI Survey)



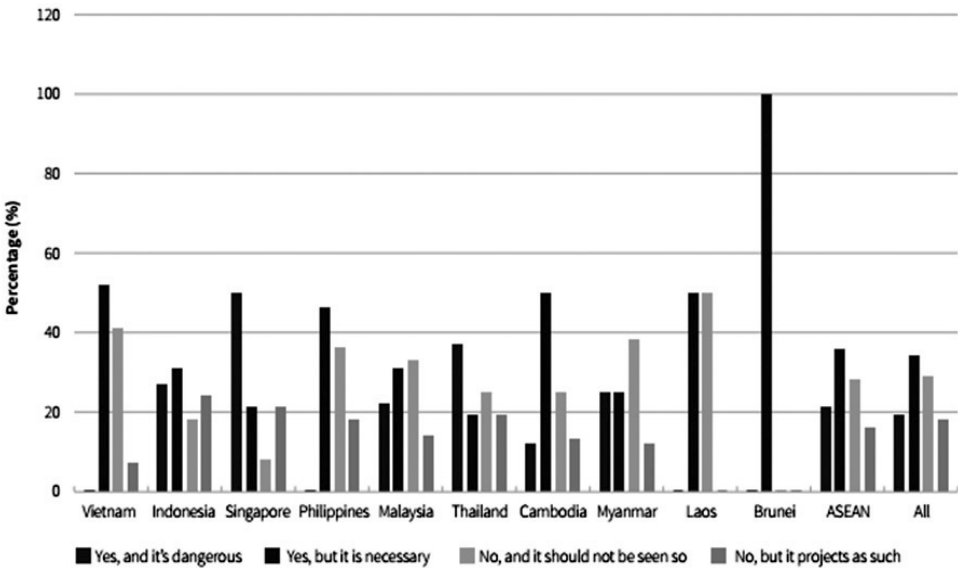
Source: Huong 2018: 16

**FIGURE 6**  
The Quad and ASEAN  
(APPFI Survey)



The current survey does not quite share an overly optimistic view toward the Quad’s relations with ASEAN. A significant proportion chose to “neither agree nor disagree” with the statements that the Quad (a) undermines ASEAN centrality (22%) and (b) that it competes with the ASEAN’s regional security mechanisms such as the ARF and ADMM+ (18%). Specifically, a majority (51%) expressed the view that the Quad does not compete with the ASEAN-led regional security architecture. However, our respondents were relatively more ambivalent as to whether or not the Quad undermines ASEAN centrality (although the most frequent response is that it does not).<sup>8</sup>

**FIGURE 7**  
The Quad as an “Anti-China Bulwark”  
(ASPI Survey)



Source: Huong 2019: 19

With regard to China's reactions towards the Quad, the ASPI survey found that a majority of respondents believe that it is an "anti-China bulwark" (57%), and when disaggregated, opined it to be "necessary" (36%) followed by "dangerous to be so" (21%). More importantly, they found that none of the Vietnamese and Filipino respondents thought that the Quad's being an anti-China bulwark was dangerous and had the highest response that "it is necessary" for the Quad to be a China containment mechanism.

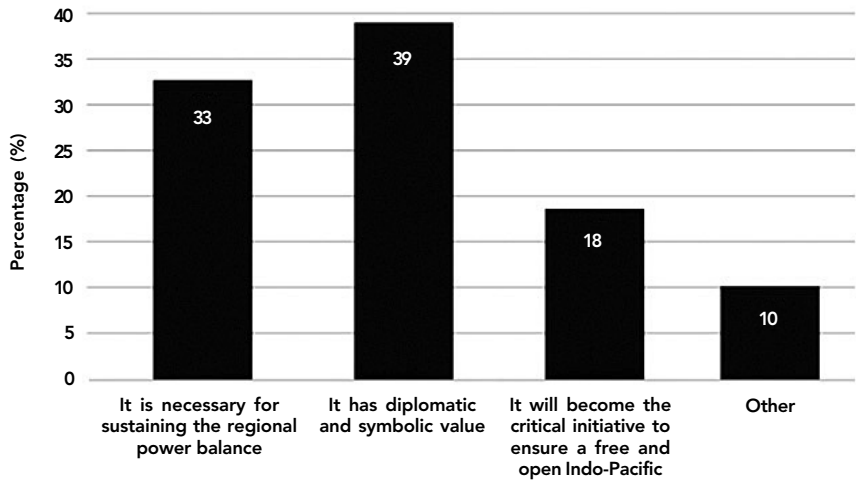
In our survey, 45% of respondents agreed that the Quad's purpose is to contain China's power. However, this statement is descriptive and does not measure the attitudes of Filipino experts toward this perceived fact, which is what the ASPI survey measures. Further to the Quad's purpose, 22% believe that it is a security alliance (perhaps China containment being merely temporally significant but conceptually not fundamental), and (as mentioned above) 26% believe that it is the "core of a new regional security arrangement." To conclude, both surveys provide empirical evidence to the widely-held perception that the Quad is a mechanism to balance an increasingly powerful and assertive China in the region.

### **The Future Impact of the Quad**

Given that the Quad is still a relatively new security arrangement, the surveys also explore the expectations of strategic thinkers and practitioners on how it may affect the regional strategic environment. Respondents of the ASPI survey are generally enthusiastic about the potential of the Quad to contribute to stability and peace in the Indo-Pacific region, in contrast to the "frequently disseminated view that Southeast Asians are predominantly negative about the Quad".

The APPFI survey focused more on the impact of the Quad on the most important security issues faced by the Philippines. It is in our opinion the best proxy for getting more candid assessments on the potential of the Quad. We asked respondents to evaluate the potential of the Quad to help manage tensions in the West Philippine Sea. 6 out of 10 respondents believe that the Quad can contribute in achieving this objective.

**FIGURE 8**  
The Importance of the Quad for Security  
and Prosperity in the Indo-Pacific  
(ASPI Survey)



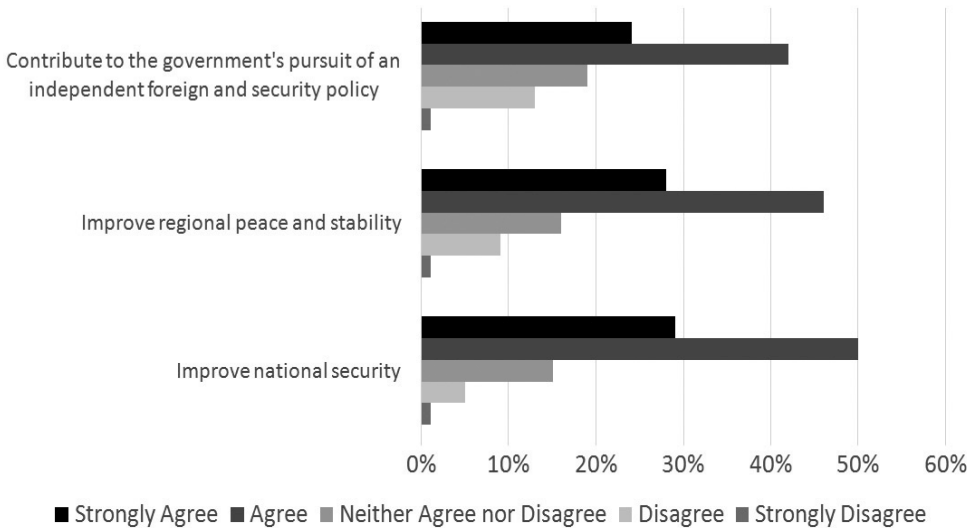
Source: Huong 2019: 11

The ASPI study assessed the impact of the Quad on the respective countries’ security environment. Its respondents are equally divided between acknowledging that the Quad will raise tensions but not affect their domestic security situation (31%) and welcoming the Quad since it will make their countries safer (32%). The divergent perceptions conform to the extant analysis that ASEAN countries do not seem to possess the interest convergence that galvanized the grouping in the past.

Our survey asked direct questions on the possible participation of the Philippines in the initiatives and activities of the Quad. Respondents were asked to speculate on the likely reactions of China if the Philippines decided to cooperate with the Quad. Our Filipino sample positively assessed the impact of the country’s participation in the Quad as it can possibly: (1) improve national security (79%); (2) improve regional peace and stability (74%); (3) contribute to the pursuit of an independent foreign policy (66%).

However, Filipino strategic thinkers and practitioners are split on whether the Quad undermines the ASEAN-led regional security architecture, with 38% believing that it does not, 40% agreeing that it does, and 22% being neutral. Finally, almost 8 out of 10 respondents believe that the participation of the Philippines in the Quad will likely be resented by China.

**FIGURE 10**  
Perceptions of the Quad's Benefits  
(APFFI Survey)



The optimism of the Filipino respondents in the APFFI survey regarding the benefits of participation in the Quad's activities is consistent with the ASPI survey's finding that Filipino (and Vietnamese) experts generally welcomed the initiative (p.21). In the ASPI survey, it is worth noting that other ASEAN states like Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand primarily see the Quad as a "vague idea" (36%) rather than a "welcomed initiative." Further research is necessary in order to explain the variation in perceptions between Filipino experts and their regional counterparts.



There were multiple points of convergence and divergence in the descriptive findings between the ASPI study, the ISEAS study, and our survey of Filipino strategic experts. No regression analysis in succeeding sections.

## **The Philippines and the Quad**

The positive views of Filipino experts towards the Quad can be traced to the generally good relations that the Philippines has with three of the four Quad members: it has a treaty alliance with the U.S., a strategic partnership with Japan, and a comprehensive partnership with Australia. While the Philippines has a cordial relationship with India, it is imperative to point out that it sees the latter as one of the states “crucial in contributing to the peace, stability, and prosperity of the East Asian region.”<sup>9</sup>

What the Quad contributes to the Philippines is a sense of familiarity and cordiality in diplomatic and military relations. The Philippines and the U.S., despite some heated rhetoric coming from Malacanang in recent years, have committed to more security and defense-related activities and exercises in 2019.<sup>10</sup> Japan and the Philippines also have strong bilateral ties. The two countries “have common cause to seek closer security cooperation with each other.”<sup>11</sup> Duterte himself prefers deepening the Philippines’ strategic partnership with Japan, and in his visit to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in May 2019, agreed to enhance the two countries’ relations in defense, maritime security, and maritime domain awareness.<sup>12</sup> With Australia, the Philippines maintains a strong defense partnership; in 2017, the two governments agreed to cooperate on counterterrorism, ship visits by the Royal Australian Navy, as well as to “enhance intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance in the Southern Philippines, strengthen information sharing, maritime security engagement, and bilateral maritime patrols”.<sup>13</sup> While Indian-Philippine security relations remain muted, the two countries have been working together on several important activities. High-level exchange visits by diplomatic and security officials of the two countries continue, while Indian navy and coast guard ships have made port calls in Manila.<sup>14</sup> An important development occurred in May of 2019 when the navies of the

U.S., Philippines, Japan, and India sailed together en route to the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus Maritime Security Field Training Exercise (ADMM-Plus MARSEC FTX) through the South China Sea.<sup>15</sup> This is the first time that such an activity happened and is potentially very significant to the continuing efforts to manage the potential conflict in the South China.

## Policy Recommendations

Our survey's main findings can be summarized in four points. First, there is a small majority of respondents who are familiar with the Quad as a multilateral security arrangement. Second, among the respondents who are aware of the Quad, they mostly view it as a "counterweight" to China's increasing assertiveness in the Asia-Pacific. Third, there is the majority view that the Philippine can benefit from its participation in activities related to the Quad. Specifically, a majority of the respondents believed that the Quad can manage tensions in the South China Sea and contribute to the Philippine government's pursuit of an independent foreign policy. Finally, our survey revealed that while the Quad could potentially serve Philippine strategic interests, the respondents expressed caution that this may undermine ASEAN centrality and the ASEAN-led regional security architecture.

The positive view of Filipino experts on the Quad's impact on the Philippines' security environment attests to the ability of the country to work with Quad members individually and collectively. The Philippines should use its good defense relationships with all Quad members to enhance its military modernization program. The EDCA needs to be implemented with haste to allow "U.S. troops and military platforms to access and preposition equipment" and contribute to the immediate and long-term modernization of the AFP.<sup>16</sup> Achieving EDCA's goals will build the AFP's capability and capacity in the long-term and allow the Philippines to take a more active and leading role in its external security to comply with its treaty obligations. The continuing strong ties between the U.S. military and the AFP show the maturity of the alliance and the capacity of both sides to manage political noise.

The Philippines should seek to acquire more equipment and ships from Japan and Australia for maritime security, maritime law enforcement, and maritime domain awareness. The recent history of aid assistance in acquiring multi-mission response vessels between the Philippines and Japan, and the Philippines and Australia all point to the capacity of the three countries to work together to beef up Manila's capabilities to enforce its rights in the South China Sea. Countering terrorism and violent extremism is where all Quad members have worked closely with the Philippines individually. This is an area where the Quad plus the Philippines' consultation can reap positive dividends in helping the latter to fight terrorists and extremists especially in its southern frontier. Countering terrorism and violent extremism, however, should not detract from the overall aim of strategic cooperation in maritime security, where the true challenge lies.

These comprehensive security linkages between the Philippines and select Quad member-countries indicate that security dialogues and agreements may still persist even in the absence of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue itself. Moreover, these linkages may also serve as avenues for the Philippines to access non-traditional security allies such as India.

The South China Sea remains to be the crucible for tensions and the testing area for the Quad in managing tensions among the claimants. While all Quad members do not take sides in the territorial claims, all of them seek to uphold freedom of navigation as a principle of international law and to prevent any one country from dominating the area and disregarding the Law of the Sea Convention. Filipino experts see the Quad as contributing to regional peace and stability by upholding the rule of law and balancing against any potential hegemon. Participating in freedom of navigation activities while enforcing its sovereign rights through increased maritime patrols should be priorities of the Philippine government and the Quad members should be ready to step in and assist when asked.

Filipino security specialists surveyed, however, see the Quad as a challenge to ASEAN centrality but the remedy to this is by emphasizing that the Quad upholds ASEAN's goals in making sure that conflicts are

managed peacefully and deterring countries from using force in enforcing their claims. The Philippine government must take pains to emphasize that cooperating with the Quad does not take away from its commitments to ASEAN or its other bilateral relations. Filipino diplomatic and defense officials need to work with the Quad to ensure that ASEAN's centrality is not undermined nor be seen as negatively affecting that centrality.

Lastly, the prevalent disjoint between domestic perception of the Quad and the Quad's true purpose can be understood as setting the bar too high especially for a security dialogue as loose as the Quad. In the context of China's assertiveness in Asia, presenting a loose security dialogue like the Quad as an "anti-China" bulwark may have serious peace and security repercussions thereby affecting the FOIP strategy altogether. This, in turn, may contribute to the Quad's untimely demise (again) despite its recent revival in 2017. Mike Pompeo's recent speech on the Quad may have put the other Quad country-members on edge. The U.S. Secretary of State suggested that the Quad may serve to contain China's assertive rise in the region – a mechanism that was not originally part of the Quad.<sup>17</sup> U.S. Vice President Mike Pence echoed a similar confrontational China policy days ahead of Secretary Pompeo.<sup>18</sup>

It is crucial, first and foremost, that expectations on the capacity and purpose of the Quad must be managed. Although the Quad itself poses promising security dividends, the notion that it is a containment strategy is misleading but it is prevalent precisely because two country-members are U.S. allies and one is U.S.' close partner in East Asia. Together, all four country-members have strategic relations with each other. Managing expectations of the Quad is all the more critical for the Philippines as it seeks to strengthen its relations with the Quad country-members without inciting further assertiveness from China.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Huong Le Thu, "Southeast Asian Perceptions of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue: Survey Findings," *ASPI Special Report*, 2018; *The State of Southeast Asia: 2019 Survey Report*, ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, 2019.
- <sup>2</sup> Mark J. Valencia, "What Does a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' Actually Mean?" *The Diplomat*, 30 March 2018. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/what-does-a-free-and-open-indo-pacific-actually-mean/>; *Demystifying Chinese Investment in Australia* (Sydney: KPMG and the University of Sydney), 2018. <http://demystifyingchina.com.au/reports/demystifying-chinese-investment-2018-June.pdf>.
- <sup>3</sup> U.S. State Department, "Advancing a Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region," 18 November 2018. <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/11/287433.htm>
- <sup>4</sup> "U.S. Commander Hints that Quad Grouping May be Shelved," *New York Times*, 7 March 2019.
- <sup>5</sup> David Santos, "Lorenzana renews call to review mutual defense treaty with U.S. after latest tension in PH sea," *CNN Philippines*, 8 June 2019. <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2019/6/8/lorenzana-russia-united-states-warship.html>
- <sup>6</sup> National Security Council of the Philippines, "National Security Policy for Change and Well-Being of the Filipino People, 2017-2022." <http://www.nsc.gov.ph/attachments/article/NSP/NSP-2017-2022.pdf>
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>8</sup> One factor of the divergence between the ASPI survey and ours is the way the questions were asked. Methodologically, the ASPI survey forced responses as mutually exclusive choices in seeing the Quad vis-à-vis ASEAN security frameworks. For example, on the question "how does the Quad affect the existing regional security frameworks (e.g., ADMM, ARF)?" the choices were whether it complements, sidelines, challenges, or does not affect these arrangements. In comparison, our survey gauges sentiments on a per item basis for the two items on the Quad's implications for ASEAN centrality and ASEAN regional security frameworks.
- <sup>9</sup> National Security Council of the Philippines, 15.
- <sup>10</sup> Patricia Lourdes Viray, "Philippines, U.S. agree on more joint security activities in 2019," *Philstar Online*, 28 September 2018. <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2018/09/28/1855516/philippines-us-agree-more-joint-security-activities-2019#BE16y1LY7R63fMSv.99>

- <sup>11</sup> Julio S. Amador III, "The Philippines' Security Cooperation with the United States and Japan," *Asia Pacific Bulletin*, 8 August 2013. <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/sites/default/files/private/apb227.pdf>
- <sup>12</sup> "PH, Japan forge stronger cooperation on defense, maritime security," *Rappler*, 1 June 2019. <https://www.rappler.com/nation/231972-philippines-japan-agree-stronger-cooperation-defense-maritime-security>
- <sup>13</sup> Willard Cheng, "Philippines, Australia agree on measures to boost military cooperation," *ABS-CBN News*, 24 October 2017. <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/10/24/17/philippines-australia-agree-on-measures-to-boost-military-cooperation>
- <sup>14</sup> Ministry of External Relations, "India-Philippines relations," October 2017. [https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India\\_Philippines\\_October\\_2017.pdf](https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India_Philippines_October_2017.pdf)
- <sup>15</sup> Frances Mangosing, "In a first, Philippines, U.S., Japan and India navies sail in South China Sea," *Inquirer.Net*, 9 May 2019. <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/175198/in-a-first-philippines-us-japan-and-india-navies-sail-in-south-china-sea#ixzz5tZ2uzk7l>
- <sup>16</sup> Gregory Poling and Conor Cronin, "The Dangers of Allowing U.S.-Philippine Defense Cooperation to Languish," *War on the Rocks*, 17 May 2018. <https://warontherocks.com/2018/05/the-dangers-of-allowing-u-s-philippine-defense-cooperation-to-languish/>
- <sup>17</sup> Iain Henry, "Finally, some plain talk on the Quad," *The Interpreter*, 25 October 2019. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/finally-some-plain-talk-quad>
- <sup>18</sup> Iain Henry, "Friends like these...allies and the Pence speech," *The Interpreter*, 23 October 2019. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/friends-these-allies-and-pence-speech>

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