

Is there a problem with...the Quad?

Feedback 27 July 2018

Dr Geoff Raby

As virtually the sole public critic in Australia of the Quad, I was delighted to see your China Matters policy brief on the Quad. Well done!

I hope this finally leads to some serious policy discussion and not to buckets of bile being tipped on you as I've been copping now for some time.

Two points which I have made consistently is 1) why is it in Australia's national interest for us to be in a grouping where the other three members are the People's Republic of China's (PRC) strategic rivals and 2) membership, e.g. at the very minimum why aren't other "democracies" in the region - notably South Korea, Indonesia and the Philippines - in the group? The first point you infer obliquely.

On the second, I agree it would not be a good look for us to walk away and so, which is the obvious implication of my critique, better to change membership. The issue here is what to do about the US and India? Practically, any East Asian body (security or whatever) will need to have ASEAN as a central part - notwithstanding all the problems and inefficiencies that might entail. I would think at first it would be better to be ASEAN plus East Asia without the US or India initially, but, as you say, with open membership as it develops.

On Oz walking away, however, I can't help but note that the US is doing a pretty good job lately of walking away from international bodies.

As for what such a body might do, I notice you reference infrastructure as one aspect. This has been floated by officials as something the Quad might do in order to hide its real purpose, which you present very clearly. The irony here is that three of the Quad can't even build infrastructure in their own countries, let alone compete with the PRC abroad.

As for irregular people movements, we already have the Bali Process on People Smuggling. Perhaps it could be folded into a new body.

But your main points are well made. The Quad as is is inimical to Australia's interests (it really is just very poorly thought out policy) and that the region needs new arrangements for security.

Finally, I'm not sure if it is intentional, or you've made the point inadvertently, but your article draws attention to just how facile is the slogan "Indo-Pacific area/region".

Dr Geoff Raby was Australia's ambassador to China from 2007 until 2011. He now runs a Beijing-based advisory firm, Geoff Raby & Associates.