

15 December 2020

# Strategic Analysis of Exercise Malabar-2020 with reference to the Quad

Author: Zaki Khalid\*

## Key Points:

- India believes that an expanded Malabar presents the emergence of a structured maritime coalition in the Indo-Pacific, amounting to a growing defence maritime architecture with reference to China.
- Malabar exercises evolved from being routine drills in the Western Indian Ocean to a multi-faceted series of exercises held in the “Indo-Pacific”. The shift in geographic posturing was a signal to China.
- Synchronicity among political leaders of Quad countries continued to face challenges primarily the obstacles to Indo-Australian strategic cooperation seemed “insurmountable”.
- Quad countries have held drills in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) only and not collectively in the Western Pacific Ocean yet.
- The second edition of Malabar-2007 and the recent exercise are a long shot away from the basic synergy in the IOR.
- Though Malabar-2020 is touted as Quad’s revival and a show-of-force against China, the actual determinant is the support from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which has become wary of the United States-China rivalry and would prefer a change in existing American policies toward the region.

Exercise Malabar-2020 was held in November with Phase 1 in the Bay of Bengal (Eastern Indian Ocean)<sup>1</sup> and Phase 2 in the Arabian Sea (Western Indian Ocean).<sup>2</sup>

Since early July, Indian media has been trying to

<sup>1</sup> Task Force 70 Public Affairs, “India Hosts Japan, Australia, U.S. in Naval Exercise, MALABAR 2020,” *America’s Navy*, last modified November 2, 2020, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/2402780/india-hosts-japan-australia-us-in-naval-exercise-malabar-2020/>.

<sup>2</sup> “Nimitz Strike Group Participates in Malabar With Australia, India, Japan,” *America’s Navy*, last modified November 17, 2020, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/Press-Releases/display-pressreleases/Article/2417181/nimitz-strike-group-participates-in-malabar-with-australia-india-and-japan/>.

\* Zaki Khalid is a strategic analyst and freelance commentator based in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. His areas of interest include national security, geopolitics, cyberspace and maritime affairs. He is also the founder and editor of ‘Pakistan Geostrategic Review (PGR)’, an independent platform publishing a premium newsletter and podcasts on geostrategic developments.

juxtapose Malabar-2020 to the Quadrilateral or ‘Quad’ comprising India, United States (US), Japan and Australia. The core narrative propagated is that the grouping, through Malabar, is aimed at sending a ‘message’ to China in the midst of the territorial disputes in the Himalayas.<sup>3</sup> A retired Indian Navy chief argued in favour of India blocking Malacca Strait to choke Chinese maritime supply routes to and from the Indian Ocean<sup>4</sup>, an idea that finds consonance in the incumbent

<sup>3</sup> Siddhant Sibal, “Amid India-China border row, navies of Quad nations kick-start Malabar exercise in Bay of Bengal,” last modified November 3, 2020, <https://zeenews.india.com/india/amid-india-china-border-row-navies-of-quad-nations-india-us-japan-australia-kick-start-malabar-naval-exercise-in-bay-of-bengal-2322205.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Arun Prakash, “Why Isn’t India Using Its ‘Maritime Leverage’ Against China?” *The Quint*, last modified July 1, 2020, <https://www.thequint.com/voices/opinion/india-china-navy-maritime-strategy-conflict-indian-ocean-south-china-sea-trade-choke-points#read-more>.

Indian Navy leadership.<sup>5</sup> Yet another ambitious Indian strategic analyst believes that an expanded Malabar “points to the emergence of a structured maritime coalition in the Indo-Pacific, amounting to an emergent defence maritime architecture vis-à-vis a revisionist China”.<sup>6</sup>

This paper presents a qualitative evaluation of Malabar-2020 from a strategic perspective. The first part analyses the history of Exercise Malabar with special reference to various formal Quad meetings while the second part consists of a trends analysis on the same using data from open sources. It concludes with an objective assessment of Malabar-2020.

## Historical Context

Malabar exercises were instituted in 1992 between naval forces of India and US as a bilateral and carried out annually in various areas of the Western Indian Ocean till the first half of 2007 when former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe began proposing his vision of a “Quadrilateral Initiative”. The inaugural yet unpublicised meeting of this forum was held in May 2007.<sup>7</sup>

A month before this conclave, an unusual Malabar-2007 was conducted in the Philippine Sea, near China.<sup>8</sup> In September 2007, another edition of Malabar-2007 was held, this time in the Eastern Indian Ocean (Bay of Bengal).<sup>9</sup> By now, Malabar exercises had evolved from being routine drills in the Western Indian Ocean to a multi-faceted series of exercises held in both the Indian and Pacific oceans, the so-called “Indo-Pacific”. The shift in geographic posturing was a signal to China.

The second edition of Malabar-2007, held in September 2007, evolved beyond bilateral naval drills to include Japan, Australia and Singapore, essentially Quad + Singapore. However, to the dismay of American and Indian observers who were hopeful of sustaining the anti-China momentum, both Australia and Singapore backed out from further participating in Malabar

<sup>5</sup> Ashok K. Mehta, “To Fight China, Should India Look Beyond LAC & ‘Control’ Malacca?” *The Quint*, last modified June 29, 2020 <https://www.thequint.com/voices/opinion/india-china-geostrategy-indian-ocean-region-strait-of-malacca-indian-and-chinese-navy#read-more>.

<sup>6</sup> Jagganath Panda, “Australia in Malabar Would Strengthen The Indo-Pacific Narrative,” *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, last modified July 13, 2020, <https://amti.csis.org/australia-in-malabar-would-strengthen-the-indo-pacific-narrative/>.

<sup>7</sup> Brahma Chellaney, “The U.S.-India-Japan-Australia Quadrilateral Initiative,” *Stagecraft and Statecraft*, last modified June 1, 2020, <https://chellaney.net/2007/06/01/the-u-s-india-japan-australia-quadrilateral-initiative/>.

<sup>8</sup> “Malabar 0701,” *Bharat Rakshak*, last modified April 9, 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130225022201/http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/NAVY/Galleries/Bridges/2007/Malabar0701/>.

<sup>9</sup> “Exercise Malabar-2007: A Major Step Towards Finetuning Maritime Capabilities,” *Sainik Samachar*, last modified September 7, 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130515094506/http://sainiksamachar.nic.in/englisharchives/2007/sep15-07/h1.htm>.

exercises, fearing a strain in economic relations with China.<sup>10</sup> For well over a decade, India’s policy establishment has remained ‘suspicious’ of Australia’s reliability.<sup>11</sup>

Synchronicity among political leaders of Quad countries continued to face an uphill challenge when two of the four leaders who championed its cause, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his Australian counterpart John Howard, left office.<sup>12</sup> Abe’s successor in 2007, Yasuo Fukuda, lacked the same enthusiasm for India and did not follow through on the rhetoric of ‘confluence of the two seas’.<sup>13</sup> In early 2008, after hosting the first visit of China’s Foreign Minister to his administration, Howard’s successor Kevin Rudd publicly opposed the Abe regime’s aspirations to form a quad against China.<sup>14</sup> This would explain why the fanfare around the second edition of Malabar-2007 held in the Bay of Bengal died down in 2008 when India and the US reverted to bilateral drills in the Western Indian Ocean. The Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force (JMSDF) did participate twice in Malabar after Abe’s departure (2009 and 2011).<sup>15</sup> <sup>16</sup> However, both these editions were held in Japanese waters, thus making Tokyo’s participation more ‘courteous’, than ‘eventful’.

After Abe’s re-election in December 2012, Japan became a regular participant in Malabar (2014 onward). An important aspect worth mentioning is the exceptional friendship between Abe and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This continuity in strategic relations with Japan during former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s government and Modi’s two terms in office can be credited to Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar. He was India’s External Affairs Minister who was previously a Foreign Secretary and Deputy

<sup>10</sup> Panda, “Australia in Malabar Would Strengthen The Indo-Pacific Narrative”

<sup>11</sup> Ramesh Thakur, “Australia and the Quad,” *ASPI The Strategist*, last modified July 5, 2018, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australia-and-the-quad/>.

<sup>12</sup> Emma Chanlett-Avery *Emerging Trends in the Security Architecture in Asia: Bilateral and Multilateral Ties Among the United States, Japan, Australia, and India*, (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 2008):1-17, Available at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34312.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> AB Nayar, “Abe will be sorely missed,” *Tribune India*, last modified November 31, 2020, <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/abe-will-be-sorely-missed-133964>.

<sup>14</sup> Evan S. Medeiros, et al, *Pacific Currents: The responses of U.S. Allies and Security Partners in East Asia to China’s Rise*, (Santa Monica: RAND, 2008): 244. Available at [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND\\_MG736.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG736.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Josh Cassatt, “India, Japan, U.S. Foster Relationships During MALABAR,” *America’s Navy*, last modified May 5, 2009, [https://web.archive.org/web/20181107061304/https://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story\\_id=45022](https://web.archive.org/web/20181107061304/https://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=45022).

<sup>16</sup> Sandeep Dikshit, “Japan to take part in India-U.S. naval exercises again,” *The Hindu*, last modified February 16, 2011, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110629122440/http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/article1459675.ece>.

Chief of Mission in Tokyo.<sup>17</sup> Jaishankar's future assignments during Singh government included as Joint Secretary (Americas), pitching him directly against the US officials. This unique set of experiences was carried forward to ensure a smooth Indo-US strategic partnership during the administration of the then-President Barack Obama.<sup>18</sup> Obama's administration considered India as the "linchpin" of the "Pivot to Asia" strategy of counterbalancing perceived Chinese assertiveness in the Asia Pacific.<sup>19</sup>

In the early years of the outgoing President Donald Trump's administration, observers had speculated that protectionist economic policies and an 'America First' policy would drastically undo America's policies toward the Asia Pacific. Contrary to the "alarmist predictions", the Trump administration went beyond reaffirming commitments to its allies to fully supporting India's capacity-building in the naval domain.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps one of the most significant and symbolic geostrategic developments in this regard was the renaming of United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) to United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM). Trump's Defence Secretary in 2018, General (Retired) James Mattis, highlighted the "increasing connectivity" of the Indian and Pacific Oceans as the rationale for this decision and, albeit vaguely, acknowledged that a "geopolitical competition" was taking place in the USINDOPACOM's area of operations.<sup>21</sup>

Australian governments have had to deal with a dilemma whereby strategic alignment with the US, including India and Japan, must be balanced with economic dependency on China. The Indo-US rapprochement since the second millennium, departing from the days of "non-alignment", may have proven beneficial for New Delhi's relations with Washington but appears to have constrained the development of security relations with Canberra. Some scholars assessed that the obstacles to closer Indo-Australian strategic cooperation seemed

"insurmountable".<sup>22</sup>

Governments of Tony Abbott and Malcolm Turnbull in Australia sent out conducive<sup>23</sup> and later less enthusiastic<sup>24</sup> signals of strategic cooperation to India, respectively. It was only recently through the virtual meeting between Modi and his new Australian counterpart Scott Morrison (June 2020) that the bilateral defence and security partnership was elevated to a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP)". Australia does not share the same resentment on territorial disputes with China, as India does, although it is wary of Chinese "militarisation" in the South China Sea (SCS)<sup>25</sup>, including an episode in 2018 whereby three Australian warships were directly 'harassed' by the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN).<sup>26</sup> Despite this predicament, Turnbull, known for harbouring less favourable views on China, exercised restraint and did not answer a request by Trump to participate in 'freedom of navigation' exercises in the SCS.<sup>27</sup>

In contrast, the Morrison government's 2020 Defence White Paper, though not naming China, cited PLAN's "militarisation" of the SCS as the first example of 'grey-zone' activities in the "Indo-Pacific".<sup>28</sup> In July 2020, Morrison's government openly aligned with the US in rejecting the legal basis of China's maritime claims in the SCS.<sup>29</sup> This deviation from Australia's traditional orientation toward China was likely the result of another incident of 'harassment' by PLAN and preparations for a robust engagement with the US before the 2020 Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN). Outgoing US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo had, around the same time, warned the "free world" of being subsumed by the

<sup>17</sup> "Minister for External Affairs S Jaishankar's unique connection with Japan," *Deccan Herald*, last modified October 6, 2020, <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/minister-for-external-affairs-s-jaishankars-unique-connection-with-japan-897972.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Burgess, *A Pivot to India? The US-India Strategic Partnership and Multipolarity in Asia*, (Colorado: INSS, 2013) Available at <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1070606.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher K. Colley and Sumit Ganguly, "The Obama administration and India," *Obama's Legacy in Asia and the Pacific*, p. 56 Accessed December 10, 2020, <https://www.manchesteropenhive.com/downloadpdf/9781526135025/9781526135025.00010.xml>.

<sup>20</sup> Harsh V Pant and Kashish Parpiani, "US Engagement in the Indo-Pacific: An Assessment of the Trump Era," *ORF Occasional Paper No. 279*, October 2020, Observer Research Foundation, Available at <https://www.orfonline.org/research/us-engagement-in-the-indo-pacific-an-assessment-of-the-trump-era/>.

<sup>21</sup> Tara Copp, "INDOPACOM, it is: US Pacific Command gets renamed," *Defense News*, last modified May 30, 2018, <https://www.defensenews.com/news/your-military/2018/05/30/indo-pacom-it-is-pacific-command-gets-renamed/#:~:text=On%20Wednesday%2C%20Mattis%20renamed%20PACOM,military%20pressure%20in%20the%20region.>

<sup>22</sup> Frederic Grare, *The India-Australia Strategic Relationship: Defining Realistic Expectations*, (Carnegie Endowment, 2014): 4. Available at [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/india\\_australia\\_strat\\_rel.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/india_australia_strat_rel.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> Tony Abbott, "The Australia-U.S. Alliance and Leadership in the Asia-Pacific," *Heritage Foundation*, last modified November 2, 2012, <https://www.heritage.org/asia/report/the-australia-us-alliance-and-leadership-the-asia-pacific>

<sup>24</sup> "Why Is India Excluding Australia From Naval Drills?" *The Diplomat*, last modified June 1, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/06/why-is-india-excluding-australia-from-naval-drills/>.

<sup>25</sup> Rosie Perper, "Australia warned China against 'intimidation' in the South China Sea after a tense standoff with a US destroyer," *Business Insider*, last modified October 3, 2018, <https://www.businessinsider.com/australia-china-us-standoff-destroyer-south-china-sea-2018-10>.

<sup>26</sup> ABC, "China Harasses Australian Navy," *Australian Morning Mail*, accessed December 10, 2020, <https://morningmail.org/china-harasses-australian-navy/>.

<sup>27</sup> Chris Johnson, "Australia caught in the middle of South China Sea conflict," *The New Daily*, last modified February 27, 2018, <https://thenewdaily.com.au/news/world/2018/02/26/south-china-sea-australia-usa/>.

<sup>28</sup> Carl Thayer, "Australia Abandons Its Neutrality on the South China Sea Maritime Disputes," *The Diplomat*, last modified July 27, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/07/australia-abandons-its-neutrality-on-the-south-china-sea-maritime-disputes/>.

<sup>29</sup> Andrew Greene, "Morrison government declares Beijing's South China Sea claims 'illegal' at United Nations," *The New Daily*, last modified October 1, 2020, <https://thenewdaily.com.au/news/national/2020/07/25/morrison-south-china-sea-claims-un/>.

Communist Party of China (CPC).<sup>30</sup> The major at-risk factor in this posturing is the Australian economy,<sup>31</sup> which continues to grow increasingly unstable in the wake of Chinese resentments.<sup>32</sup> Morrison was quick to take a U-turn, vowing that Australia would ‘not pick sides’ between the US and China,<sup>33</sup> sparking another domestic political outrage.<sup>34</sup>

The preceding context provides important takeaways (See figure 1):-

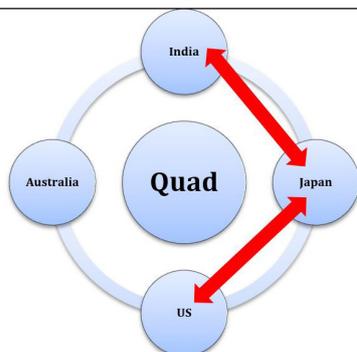


Figure 1: Geopolitical synchronicity among Quad countries (red indicates personality-based alignments)- Image by Author

- Indo-US strategic relations since the inaugural Quad meeting remained consistent due to systemic discussions, thus successfully transitioning through various leadership changes.
- Japan-US strategic alignment in the Asia Pacific to contain China were apparently personality-led (by Abe) instead of being systemic, impacting institutional networking for the Quad (2007 till 2012).
- Australia-US relations on the Quad diverged on matters of economics and trade since Canberra generally remained reluctant to antagonise China. Morrison’s abrupt deviation has already yielded adverse dividends, prompting reversion to the traditional orientation.
- Indo-Japan strategic relations prospered mainly due to the network of Abe’s links with Jaishankar, ensuring continuity within the Singh- and Modi-era terms. The

<sup>30</sup> “Mike Pompeo says free world must change China or ‘China will change us,’” *The Guardian*, last modified July 24, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/24/mike-pompeo-says-free-world-must-change-china-or-china-will-change-us>.

<sup>31</sup> Fumi Matsumoto, “Australia’s soaring exports to China at risk in diplomatic rift,” *Nikkei Asia*, last modified August 7, 2020, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Trade/Australia-s-soaring-exports-to-China-at-risk-in-diplomatic-rift2>.

<sup>32</sup> Reuters, “Timeline-Tension between China and Australia over Commodities Trade,” *Successful Farming*, last modified November 4, 2020, <https://www.agriculture.com/markets/newswire/timeline-tension-between-china-and-australia-over-commodities-trade-0>.

<sup>33</sup> “Scott Morrison says Australia will not pick sides between China and US,” *SBS News*, last modified November 24, 2020, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/scott-morrison-says-australia-will-not-pick-sides-between-china-and-us>.

<sup>34</sup> Finn McHugh, “PM accused of ‘significant tactical error’ on China,” *News Australia*, last modified November 25, 2020, <https://www.news.com.au/finance/economy/australian-economy/pm-accused-of-significant-tactical-error-on-china/news-story/adbc49d20a1fa8efc656b284c85624a6>.

succession of Abe’s senior-most aide Yoshihide Suga as Japanese Prime Minister is unlikely to change course in terms of the policies on Quad.

- Indo-Australian strategic relations suffer from structural limitations which even minor political convergences cannot rectify.

## Trends Analysis

Various editions of the Malabar exercises were examined in detail (See annexure-I).

All editions of Exercise Malabar that succeeded a formal Quad meet were held equally in the Eastern Indian, and the Western Pacific Oceans except Malabar-2020 which covered the entire IOR, including the Arabian Sea in the Western Indian Ocean (see figure 2). One plausible inference is that the inclusion of Australia after a gap of 13 years needed projection beyond China’s near seas and more toward Africa, where an unannounced power competition is underway.

Majority editions of Exercise Malabar were held bilaterally between India and the US. These editions took place in the Western Indian Ocean, particularly along India’s western seaboard. Prior to Malabar-2020, the remaining Quad countries (Japan and Australia) participated only in the Eastern Indian and Western Pacific Oceans (See figure 3).

Since its inception, there are seven distinct areas/zones in which various editions of Exercise Malabar were held. A geographic plotting of the various Malabar editions according to participation (bilateral, trilateral, quadrilateral, and multilateral) reveals the following (See figure 4):-

- Bilateral drills between India and the US took place within IOR only.
- Trilateral drills involving India, the US and Japan took place in the Western Pacific Ocean only.
- Quad countries held drills within IOR only.
- Quad countries have, thus far, not held drills in the Western Pacific Ocean.

The details of all naval assets which participated in various editions of Exercise Malabar (1992-2020) are not available in the public domain. Based on an aggregate of open-source information, a basic interoperability matrix was developed, listing the known naval assets of Quad countries that participated in multiple editions of Exercise Malabar (See annexure-II). The following was revealed:-

## Aircraft Carrier Fleet

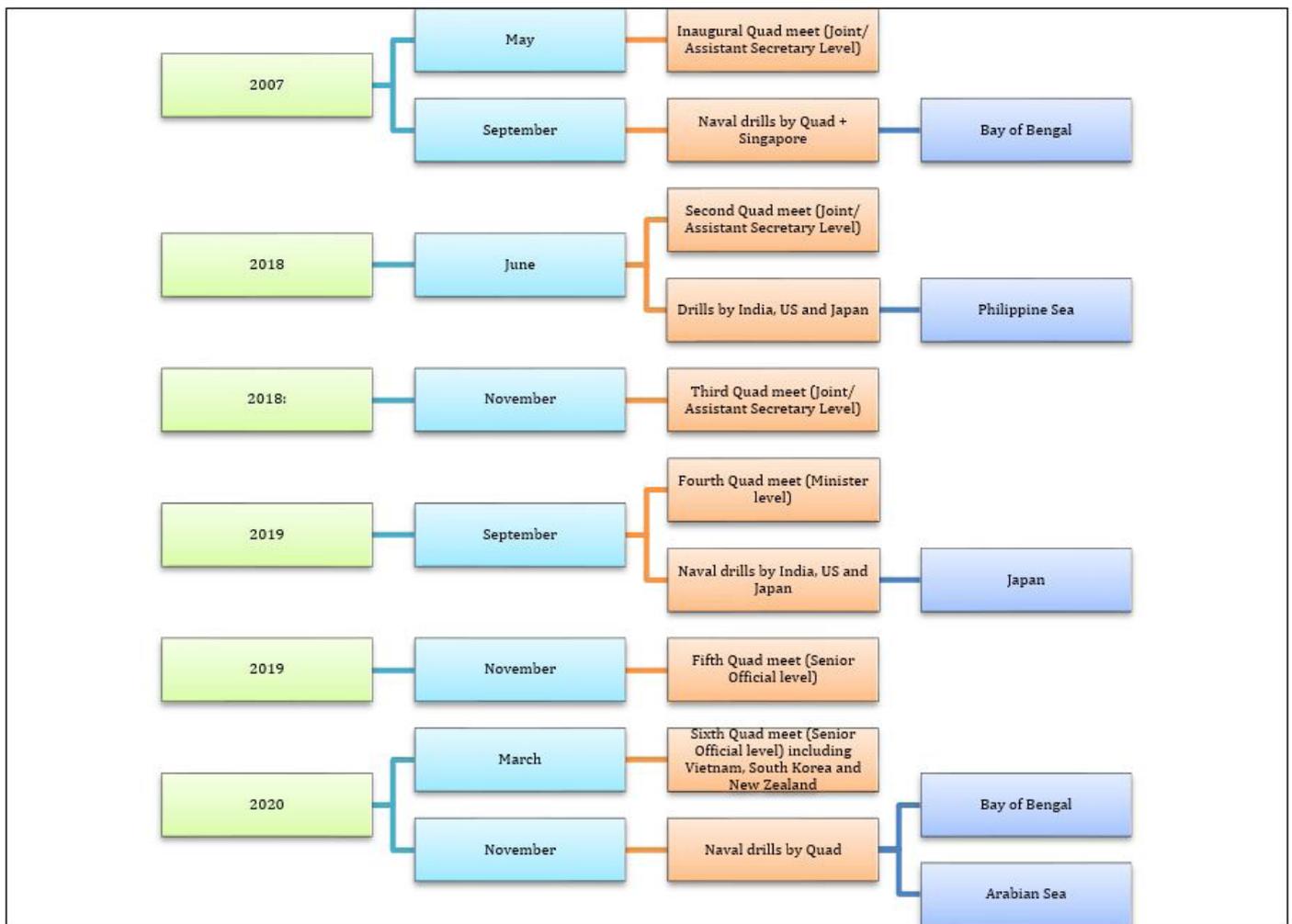


Figure 2: Author's intersectional mapping of Quad meetings with successive editions of Exercise Malabar

- Only India and the US have, thus far, participated with aircraft carriers.
- INS Viraat and USS Nimitz possess operational experience in both Indian and Pacific Oceans. But the

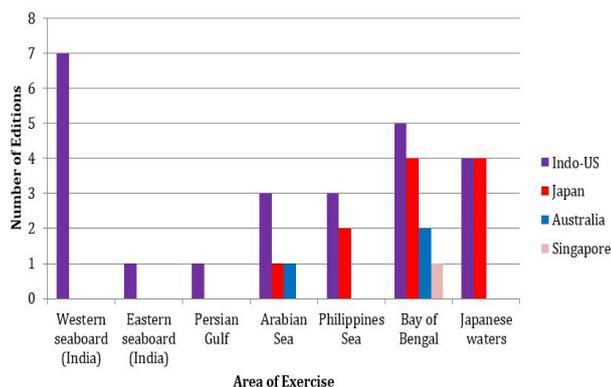


Figure 3: Author's area-wise breakdown of Exercise Malabar (1992-2020)

Indian Navy has decommissioned the former.<sup>35</sup> While personnel experience is equally important, the platform change for Indian Navy could prompt a visit to the

<sup>35</sup> "Thank You INS Viraat! World's longest-serving warship reaches its final destination," *Financial Express*, last modified Septemeber 29, 2020, <https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/thank-you-ins-viraat-worlds-longest-serving-warship-reaches-its-final-destination/2093870/>.

Western Pacific Ocean by INS Vikramaditya.

### Surface Fleet

- Indian Navy's surface warfare platforms have the highest share in multiple Malabar editions, focused entirely on Eastern Indian and Western Pacific Oceans, indicating distinct experiences among various assets operating along India's western and eastern seaboard.
- Indian Navy's surface fleet in the Western Indian Ocean does not have multiple participations in Malabar.
- Australia has never sent the same surface fleet during its two-time participation.

### Submarine Fleet

Indian Navy's diesel-electric submarine INS Sindhuraj has multiple experiences in Malabar, but none in the Pacific Ocean.

### Auxiliary Fleet

As far as replenishment is concerned, Indian Navy's INS Jyoti and INS Shakti both have multiple exercise deployments but none in the Western Indian Ocean.

### Naval Aviation Fleet

- Quad countries, excluding Australia, have multiple



Figure 4: Author’s geographic plotting of Exercise Malabar according to Quad member participation (Tool: Google Maps)

operational experiences under Malabar, mostly in the Western Pacific Ocean.

- US Navy’s P-3C Orion is the only aviation asset that has multiple Malabar deployments in both Indian and Pacific Oceans.

Under the Malabar banner, US Navy led the quantum of Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR)

Malabar, viewed with reference to the Quad, presents a different picture than the rhetoric espoused in Western think tank commentaries, and frequently in the Indian media. While the Quad has been juxtaposed with Exercise Malabar since its formal institution in 2007, even trilateral drills involving India, US and Japan have never taken place in the Indian Ocean. Therefore, the second edition of Malabar-2007 and the recent exercise

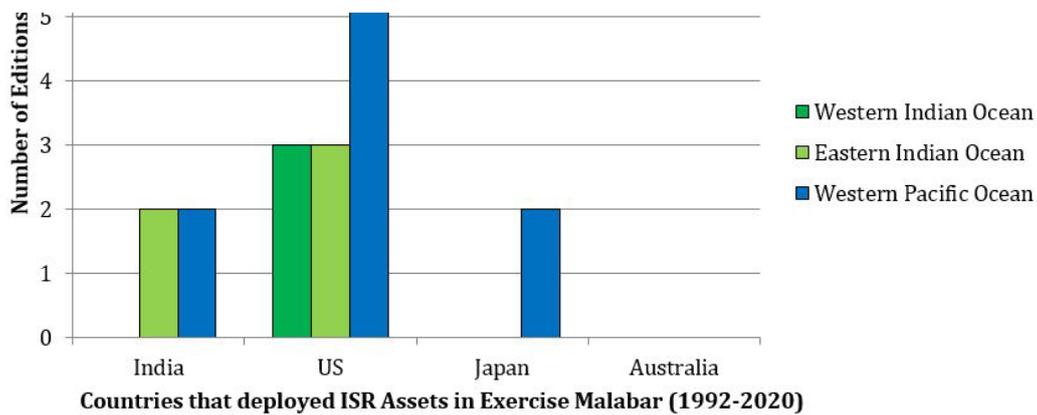


Figure 5: ISR asset participation by Quad countries in Exercise Malabar (1992-2020)

asset deployments. An overwhelming majority of these ISR drills took place in the Pacific Ocean. Japan’s ISR sorties, meanwhile, remained limited to the Pacific Ocean (see figure 5).

### Assessment

The comprehensive trends analysis of Exercise

are a long shot away from the basic synergy in the IOR.

What remains certain is that the thrust of anti-China force posturing using the ‘Quad’ slogan is led by the Indo-US naval combine. Scholars on the Asia Pacific have urged the Suga administration to carry forward Abe’s “rules-based maritime order” while abstaining from backing “a NATO-like military alliance in the

## Annexure-I: OPEN SOURCE DATASET ON EXERCISE MALABAR (1992-2020)

Year	Countries <sup>d</sup>	Exercise Zone	Assets	Drill Types
1992		Western Indian Ocean	<b>India/ US:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Destroyers (unspecified)</li> <li>• Frigates (unspecified)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic manoeuvres</li> <li>• PASSEX</li> </ul>
1995		Western Indian Ocean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>India:</b></li> <li>• 1x warship (unspecified)</li> <li>• US:</li> <li>• 1x nuclear submarine (unspecified)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ASW</li> <li>• PASSEX</li> </ul>
1996		Western Indian Ocean	<b>India:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3x warships (unspecified)</li> <li>• US:</li> <li>• 3x warships (unspecified)</li> <li>• 1x logistics ship (unspecified)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unknown</li> </ul>
2002		Western Indian Ocean	<b>India:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2x destroyers/ frigates (unspecified)</li> <li>• US:</li> <li>• 2x destroyers/ frigates (unspecified)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic manoeuvres</li> <li>• UNREP</li> </ul>
2003		Western Indian Ocean	<b>US:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x destroyer USS Fitzgerald</li> <li>• 1x cruiser USS Chosin</li> <li>• 1x nuclear submarine USS Pasadena</li> <li>• 1x P-3C Orion aircraft</li> <li>• Other unspecified assets</li> </ul> <b>India:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2x frigates INS Brahmaputra and INS Ganga</li> <li>• 1x diesel submarine INS Shalki</li> <li>• ASW aircraft (unspecified type and number)</li> <li>• Other unspecified assets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross-deck helicopter landings</li> <li>• ASW</li> <li>• VBSS</li> </ul>

Indo-Pacific.”<sup>36</sup> If Suga’s statement during a recent visit to Indonesia is to be believed, Japan is unlikely to boost its existing momentum.<sup>37</sup> Separately, mixed signals by the Morrison government will keep the Quad-Malabar link lingering in uncertainty unless Canberra finds a way out of its economic dependence on Beijing, a scenario unlikely to develop till the foreseeable future.

From the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) perspective, Quad’s manoeuvring is limited to its Southern Theatre Command which makes joint counterforce planning simpler when compared to systemic incompatibilities and bureaucratic red-tapism inherent in Indian and American military component commands. Exercise Malabar-2020 may have flashed international

<sup>36</sup> Ko Hirano, “FOCUS: Don’t pursue strike capability or NATO-like Asia, scholars tell Suga,” *Kyodo News*, last modified September 22, 2020, <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2020/09/c6f6e812ca3f-focus-dont-pursue-strike-capability-or-nato-like-asia-scholars-tell-suga.html>.

<sup>37</sup> Dian Septiari, “Japan’s Suga dismisses concern over ‘Asian NATO’ in Indo-Pacific,” *The Jakarta Post*, last modified October 22, 2020, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/10/21/japans-suga-dismisses-concern-over-asian-nato-in-indo-pacific.html>.

headlines to champion the ‘revival’ of Quad as a collective show-of-force against China. Still, the actual determinant factor is the support from the ASEAN, which has become wary of US-China rivalry and would prefer a change in existing American policies toward the region.<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, China understands the political divergence of interests among Quad members which are likely to prohibit the expansion of its scope and scale.<sup>39</sup> For some observers in China, Quad’s posturing is mere “bluffs”.<sup>40</sup> An objective assessment of Exercise Malabar-2020 would concur with this assertion and shoot down the prevailing hype.

<sup>38</sup> Jonathan Stromseth, “DON’T MAKE US CHOOSE: Southeast Asia In The Throes Of US-China Rivalry,” *The New Geopolitics Asia*, (October 2019):19 & 21. [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/FP\\_20191009\\_dont\\_make\\_us\\_choose.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/FP_20191009_dont_make_us_choose.pdf).

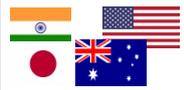
<sup>39</sup> Lu Yuanzhi, “US ambitions to expand QUAD set to fail,” *Global Times*, last modified September 25, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1204600.shtml>.

<sup>40</sup> “QUAD members fight for interests with each other,” *Global Times*, last modified, September 20, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1204119.shtml>.

2004		Western Indian Ocean	<p><b>US:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x destroyer USS Paul F. Foster</li> <li>• 1x nuclear submarine USS Alexandria</li> <li>• 1x submarine (unspecified)</li> <li>• 1x P-3C Orion maritime patrol aircraft</li> <li>• SH-60B Seahawk LAMPS MKIII helicopter (unspecified number)</li> </ul> <p><b>India:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x Indian diesel submarine (unspecified)</li> <li>• Other unspecified assets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tactical encounter at sea</li> <li>• Night-time UNREP</li> <li>• VBSS</li> </ul>
2005		Western Indian Ocean	<p><b>India:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x aircraft carrier INS Viraat</li> <li>• 1x diesel submarine (unspecified)</li> <li>• Other unspecified assets</li> </ul> <p><b>US:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x aircraft carrier USS Nimitz</li> <li>• 1x nuclear submarine (unspecified)</li> <li>• Other unspecified assets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SSN operations</li> <li>• Carrier operations</li> <li>• Diving salvage operations</li> </ul>
2006		Western Indian Ocean	<p><b>US:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• USS Boxer Expeditionary Strike Group comprising 13 x ships (unspecified)</li> <li>• 1x nuclear submarine USS Providence</li> <li>• 1x Coast Guard Cutter Midget (unspecified)</li> </ul> <p><b>India:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x Coast Guard patrol ship</li> <li>• Other unspecified assets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maritime law enforcement</li> <li>• Anti-piracy operations</li> <li>• SAR</li> <li>• VBSS</li> <li>• SSN operations</li> <li>• Expeditionary operations</li> </ul>
2007 (1)		Western Pacific Ocean	<p><b>India:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x aircraft carrier INS Viraat</li> <li>• Other unspecified assets</li> </ul> <p><b>US:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2x aircraft carriers USS Nimitz and USS Kitty Hawk</li> <li>• 1x nuclear submarine (unspecified)</li> <li>• 1x P-3C Orion aircraft</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multi-carrier operations</li> <li>• Amphibious operations</li> <li>• SSN operations</li> </ul>
2007 (2)		Eastern Indian Ocean	<p><b>US:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2x aircraft carriers USS Nimitz and USS Kitty Hawk</li> <li>• 1x nuclear submarine USS Chicago</li> <li>• 2x missile cruisers (unspecified)</li> <li>• 6x guided destroyers (unspecified)</li> <li>• Other unspecified ships</li> </ul> <p><b>India:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x aircraft carrier INS Viraat</li> <li>• Sea Harrier jets embarked on INS Viraat (unspecified number)</li> <li>• Sea King helicopters embarked on INS Viraat (unspecified number)</li> <li>• Jaguar strike aircraft embarked on INS Viraat (unspecified number)</li> <li>• 3x destroyers INS Mysore, INS Rana and INS Ranjit</li> <li>• 1x fleet tanker INS Jyoti</li> <li>• 1x corvette INS Kuthar</li> </ul> <p><b>Australia:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x frigate (unspecified)</li> <li>• 1x tanker (unspecified)</li> </ul> <p><b>Japan:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2x tankers (unspecified)</li> </ul> <p><b>Singapore:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x frigate (unspecified)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carrier operations</li> <li>• SSN operations</li> <li>• Counter-terrorism operations</li> <li>• Counter-piracy operations</li> </ul>

2008		Western Indian Ocean	<p><b>US:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan</li> <li>• Carrier Strike Group-7 based off USS Ronald Reagan</li> <li>• 1x nuclear submarine (unspecified)</li> </ul> <p><b>India:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x Indian diesel submarine (unspecified)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carrier operations</li> <li>• SSN operations</li> <li>• ASW</li> <li>• VBSS</li> <li>• Counter-terrorism</li> </ul>
2009		Western Pacific Ocean	<p><b>India:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2x destroyers INS Mumbai and INS Ranvir</li> <li>• 1x corvette INS Khanjar</li> <li>• 1x oil tanker INS Jyoti</li> </ul> <p><b>Japan:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2x destroyers JDS Kurama and JDS Asayuki</li> </ul> <p><b>US:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x assault ship USS Blue Ridge</li> <li>• 2x destroyers USS Fitzgerald and USS Chafee</li> <li>• 1x nuclear submarine USS Seawolf</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surface warfare</li> <li>• ASW</li> <li>• Air defence</li> <li>• VBSS</li> <li>• Gunnery training</li> </ul>
2010		Western Indian Ocean	<p><b>India:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3x ships (unspecified type)</li> </ul> <p><b>US:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x cruiser USS Shiloh</li> <li>• 2x destroyers USS Lassen and USS Chafee</li> <li>• 1x frigate USS Curtts</li> <li>• 1x nuclear submarine USS Annapolis</li> <li>• 1x P-3 Orion aircraft</li> <li>• SH-60 helicopters (unspecified number)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ASW</li> <li>• VBSS</li> <li>• Cross-deck helicopter landings</li> <li>• Gunnery training</li> <li>• Air Defence</li> <li>• Community service project in Goa</li> </ul>
2011		Western Pacific Ocean	<p><b>US:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carrier Strike Group-7</li> <li>• 2x destroyers USS Sterett and USS Stethem</li> <li>• 1x frigate Reuben James</li> <li>• 1x nuclear submarine USS Santa Fe</li> </ul> <p><b>India:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3x destroyers INS Delhi, INS Ranvijay and INS Ranvir</li> <li>• 1x corvette INS Kirch</li> <li>• 1x oil tanker INS Jyoti</li> </ul> <p><b>Japan:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unspecified assets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ASW</li> <li>• VBSS</li> <li>• Cross-deck helicopter landings</li> <li>• Gunnery training</li> <li>• Air defence</li> <li>• UNREP</li> <li>• HADR</li> <li>• Maritime strike</li> <li>• Liaison officer exchange and embarkation</li> </ul>
2012		Eastern Indian Ocean	<p><b>US:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carrier Strike Group-1</li> <li>• 1x oil tanker USNS Bridge</li> </ul> <p><b>India:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2x destroyers INS Ranvir and INS Ranvijay</li> <li>• 1x corvette INS Kulish</li> <li>• 1x oil tanker INS Shakti</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SAG operations</li> <li>• Cross-deck helicopter landings</li> <li>• Gunnery training</li> </ul>
2013		Eastern Indian Ocean	<p><b>US:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x destroyer USS McCampbell</li> <li>• 1x P-3 Orion aircraft</li> </ul> <p><b>India:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x frigate INS Shivalik</li> <li>• 1x destroyer INS Ranvijay</li> <li>• 1x Indian maritime reconnaissance aircraft Tupolev Tu-142</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SAG operations</li> <li>• Gunnery training</li> <li>• Cross-deck helicopter landings</li> <li>• ASW</li> <li>• VBSS</li> </ul>

2014		Western Pacific Ocean	<p><b>US:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x nuclear submarine (unspecified)</li> <li>• 2x destroyers (unspecified)</li> <li>• 1x oil tanker (unspecified)</li> <li>• 1x maritime reconnaissance aircraft (unspecified)</li> <li>• Carrier Strike Group (unspecified) based off the aircraft carrier USS George Washington</li> <li>• 2x destroyers (unspecified)</li> <li>• 1x maritime surveillance P-3 Orion aircraft</li> <li>• 1x amphibious craft ShinMaywa US-2</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carrier operations</li> <li>• Maritime patrol and reconnaissance operations</li> <li>• Cross-deck helicopter landings</li> <li>• UNREP</li> <li>• Gunnery training</li> <li>• ASW</li> <li>• Counter-piracy operations</li> <li>• VBSS</li> <li>• SAR</li> <li>• Liaison officer exchange and embarkation</li> </ul>
2015		Eastern Indian Ocean	<p><b>US:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt</li> <li>• Carrier Airwing-1</li> <li>• 1x cruiser USS Normandy</li> <li>• 1x littoral combat ship USS Fort Worth</li> <li>• 1x nuclear submarine USS City of Corpus Christi</li> </ul> <p><b>India:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2x frigates INS Shivalik and INS Betwa</li> <li>• 1x destroyer INS Ranvijay</li> <li>• 1x diesel submarine INS Sindhuraj</li> <li>• 1x oil tanker INS Shakti</li> <li>• 1x destroyer JS Fuyuzuki</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Air defence</li> <li>• VBSS</li> <li>• ASW</li> <li>• Gunnery training</li> </ul>
2016		Western Pacific Ocean	<p><b>US:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis</li> <li>• 1x cruiser USS Mobile Bay</li> <li>• 3x destroyers USS Stockdale, USS William P. Lawrence and USS Chung-Hoon</li> <li>• 1x P-8A Poseidon aircraft</li> <li>• 1x nuclear submarine (unspecified)</li> </ul> <p><b>India:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2x frigates INS Satpura and INS Sahyadri</li> <li>• 1x frigate INS Kirch</li> <li>• 1x oil tanker INS Shakti</li> <li>• 1x Sea King 42B ASW helicopter</li> <li>• 2x Chetak utility helicopters</li> </ul> <p><b>Japan:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x helicopter carrier JS Hyuga</li> <li>• SH-60K helicopters embarked on JS Hyuga (unspecified number)</li> <li>• 1x long-range maritime patrol aircraft (unspecified)</li> <li>• Other unspecified assets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surface warfare</li> <li>• VBSS</li> <li>• Subject-matter and professional exchanges</li> <li>• Maritime patrol and reconnaissance</li> <li>• ASW</li> </ul>
2017		Eastern Indian Ocean	<p><b>US:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x aircraft carrier USS Nimitz</li> <li>• Aircraft embarked on USS Nimitz (unspecified type and number)</li> <li>• 1x cruiser USS Princeton</li> <li>• 3x destroyers USS Howard, USS Shoup and USS Kidd</li> <li>• 1x fast-attack submarine (unspecified)</li> <li>• 1x Poseidon P-8A aircraft</li> </ul> <p><b>Japan:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x helicopter carrier JS Izumo</li> <li>• Aircraft embarked on JS Izumo (unspecified type and number)</li> <li>• 1x destroyer JS Sazanami</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carrier operations</li> <li>• Air defence</li> <li>• ASW</li> <li>• Surface warfare</li> <li>• VBSS</li> <li>• SAR</li> <li>• Joint and tactical procedures</li> </ul>

2017			<p><b>India:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya</li> <li>• Aircraft embarked on INS Vikramaditya (unspecified type and number)</li> <li>• 1x destroyer INS Ranvir</li> <li>• 2x frigates INS Shivalik and INS Sahyadri</li> <li>• 1x ASW corvette INS Kamorta</li> <li>• 2x missile corvettes INS Kora and INS Kirpan</li> <li>• 1x diesel submarine (unspecified)</li> <li>• 1x oil tanker INS Jyoti</li> <li>• 1x Poseidon P-8I aircraft</li> </ul>	
2018		Western Pacific Ocean	<p><b>US:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan</li> <li>• Aircraft embarked on USS Ronald Reagan (unspecified type and number)</li> <li>• 2x cruisers USS Antietam and USS Chancellorsville</li> <li>• 2x destroyers USS Benfold and USS Mustin</li> <li>• 1x nuclear submarine (unspecified)</li> <li>• 1x Poseidon P-8A aircraft</li> </ul> <p><b>Japan:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x helicopter carrier JS Ise</li> <li>• Helicopters embarked on JS Ise (unspecified type and number)</li> <li>• 2x destroyers JS Suzunami and JS Fuyuzuki</li> <li>• 1x Kawasaki P-1 maritime patrol aircraft</li> <li>• 1x attack submarine (unspecified)</li> </ul> <p><b>India:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x frigate INS Sahyadri</li> <li>• 1x ASW corvette INS Kamorta</li> <li>• 1x oil tanker INS Shakti</li> <li>• 1x Boeing P-8I Neptune aircraft</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carrier operations</li> <li>• Maritime patrol and reconnaissance</li> <li>• VBSS</li> <li>• Professional exchanges</li> </ul>
2019		Western Pacific Ocean	<p><b>US:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x destroyer USS McCampbell</li> <li>• 1x Boeing P-8A Poseidon aircraft</li> </ul> <p><b>Japan:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x destroyer JS Kaga</li> <li>• 2x destroyers JS Samidare and JS Choukai</li> <li>• 1x Kawasaki P-1 maritime patrol aircraft</li> </ul> <p><b>Indian:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x frigate INS Sahyadri</li> <li>• 1x ASW corvette INS Kiltan</li> <li>• 1x Indian Boeing P-81 Neptune aircraft</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ASW</li> <li>• Anti-air firings</li> <li>• Anti-surface firings</li> <li>• Maritime interdiction operations</li> <li>• VBSS</li> <li>• Tactical scenario-based exercise</li> <li>• Subject-matter and professional exchanges</li> </ul>
2020		Western Indian Ocean / Eastern Indian Ocean	<p><b>US:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x aircraft carrier USS Nimitz</li> <li>• 1x destroyer USS John S. McCain</li> </ul> <p><b>Indian:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya</li> <li>• 1x frigate INS Shivalik</li> <li>• 1x Sea King 42C helicopter embarked on INS Shivalik</li> <li>• 1x destroyer INS Ranvijay</li> <li>• 1x diesel submarine INS Sindhuraj</li> <li>• 1x oil tanker INS Shakti</li> </ul> <p><b>Australia:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1x Australian frigate HMAS Ballarat</li> <li>• 1x MH-60R Sea Hawk helicopter embarked on HMAS Ballarat</li> </ul> <p><b>Japan:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2x Japanese destroyers JS Onami and JS Murasame</li> <li>• 1x Japanese SH-60 Super Auk helicopter embarked on JS Onami</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'High-end' tactical training including night operations</li> <li>• RASAPs</li> <li>• Gunnery training</li> <li>• Specific interactions to enhance interoperability (unspecified)</li> </ul>

Information compiled by the author from various sources including a paper by Indian Navy Captain (Retired) Gurpreet Khurana, and official press releases issued by the navies and national press departments of Quad countries.<sup>41</sup>

## Annexure-II: BASIC INTEROPERABILITY MATRIX – MULTIPLE PARTICIPATING ASSETS IN EXERCISE MALABAR<sup>42\*</sup>

ASSET	WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN	EASTERN INDIAN OCEAN	WESTERN PACIFIC OCEAN
<b>Aircraft Carriers</b>			
 INS Viraat	✓	✓	✓
 INS Vikramaditya	✓	✓	
 USS Nimitz	✓	✓	✓
 USS Kitty Hawk		✓	✓
 USS Ronald Reagan		✓	✓
<b>Surface Fleet</b>			
 INS Ranvir		✓	✓
 INS Ranvijay		✓	✓
 INS Sahyadri		✓	✓
 INS Kirch			✓
 INS Kamorta		✓	✓
 INS Shivalik		✓	
 USS Chafee	✓		✓
 USS McCampbell		✓	✓
 JS Fuyuzuki		✓	✓
<b>Submarine Fleet</b>			
 INS Sindhuraj		✓	
<b>Auxiliary Fleet</b>			
 INS Jyoti		✓	✓
 INS Shakti		✓	✓
<b>Naval Aviation Assets</b>			

<sup>41</sup> Gurpreet Khurana, "India-US MALABAR Naval Exercises: Trends and Tribulations," accessed December 10, 2020, [https://www.academia.edu/7879273/India\\_US\\_MALABAR\\_Naval\\_Exercises\\_Trends\\_and\\_Tribulations](https://www.academia.edu/7879273/India_US_MALABAR_Naval_Exercises_Trends_and_Tribulations).

<sup>42</sup> This list does not include naval assets which participated only once or remain unknown.  
\*Information based on the dataset in Annexure-I

 Sea King variants		✓	✓
 P-81 Neptune		✓	✓
 P-3C Orion	✓	✓	✓
 P-8A Poseidon		✓	✓
 P-1			✓
 SH-60 variants		✓	✓