

## International Disaster Response: Rebuilding the Quad?

Stimson Center

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### SUMMARY

#### *Panelists:*

Yuki Tatsumi (Moderator)

Kate Stevenson (Panelist)

Akriti Vasudeva (Panelist)

Yasuhito Jibiki (Panelist)

Pamela Kennedy (Panelist)

On March 11, 2019, the Stimson Center's Japan Program hosted a panel discussion to launch its newest publication, *International Disaster Response: Rebuilding the Quad?* The discussion was moderated by Yuki Tatsumi from the Stimson Center with the four of the five authors of the report as panelists, including Kate Stevenson (Fellow, Australia-Japan Research Centre), Akriti Vasudeva (Research Associate, Stimson Center), Yasuhito Jibiki (Assistant Professor, Tōhoku University), and Pamela Kennedy (Research Associate, Stimson Center). H. D. P. Envall (Fellow & Senior Lecturer, Australian National University) was unable to attend in person, but Stevenson was able to speak on his behalf. Tatsumi began the event by discussing how the *Views from the Next Generation* series lifts the voices of young talent in the policy conversation. She then introduced the topic of disaster relief, focusing on the reemergence of the Quad as a possible path forward for cooperation.

Kate Stevenson spoke on Australia's role in disaster relief cooperation and the role of its military engagement. Her interpretation of the Quad is more of a coexistence than actual cooperation. While many experts see the Quad as a mechanism to contain China, Stevenson said that such an interpretation is an image issue that needs to be tackled. While admitting the difficulty of a "re-imagining" process given the geographic proximity of Japan and India to China, she stressed the importance of having a clear Quad position. She then made a second point on the operational level. She raised the question of whether the Quad will align with existing frameworks of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR), which centers on the United Nations and acts only on request from disaster-affected countries. She then raised another question of whether Quad cooperation in disaster response should be a civilian- or military-focused forum. The reason for such a question, according to Stevenson, is that the basic principle of disaster relief is focused on civilian capacities rather than military assistance. She suggested that the Quad clarify its focus. Finally, she recalled that the Quad originally began with HA/DR, and Australia should consider the appropriate use of it as such.

Akriti Vasudeva gave her opinions from an Indian perspective. She explained the motivations of India to involve itself in disaster relief actions, including India itself being among the most disaster-vulnerable countries. She listed an abundance of cases in which India has leveraged its disaster relief experience to help its neighboring countries deal with tsunamis and earthquakes. Vasudeva discussed three benefits for India to engage itself in Quad cooperation on disaster relief. The first is the projection of soft power and the image of being a public goods provider in the region, boosting its net security provider credentials. The second is to test the utility of the Quad to go beyond the present consultative mechanisms for the good of India. The third

benefit is burden sharing and the transfer of disaster relief knowledge among Quad countries. However, she also pointed out two major factors hindering India from being fully engaged. Having the Quad reemerge as a tangible form of cooperation could play into the Chinese narrative of the Quad as a containment mechanism. Additionally, India may need increased reasons to transition from simpler and already existing forms of bilateral cooperation on these issues to more complicated and less certain multilateral cooperation. Vasudeva then explained how India’s colonial history may make it rather sensitive for the Indian government to work with foreign powers in the Indo-Pacific region. Despite these concerns, she highlighted that the Quad has symbolic and material meanings. She noted that the fact that the existence of such a forum has worried China demonstrates that a grouping of democratic countries could be a powerful incentive against the draws of China. For material reasons, India has developed tools, data, equipment, and experience to bolster its leadership in disaster relief, all of which it could share effectively with Quad partners and across its region. She ended her remarks by suggesting that the Indian government invite Australia to the Malabar naval exercise, in order to prepare for the possibility of a more assertive China.

Yasuhito Jibiki began his remarks speaking on his analysis of the Quad countries’ varying budgets on HA/DR. Jibiki then introduced the definition of disaster relief from a Japanese government perspective, which, contrary to other understandings, stresses not only the emergency phase but also the recovery, reconstruction, and preparedness phases, which are formally noted in the Sendai Framework. He suggested Quad to share the same understanding of disaster relief with Japan. Jibiki pointed out his opinion that military coordination within HA/DR has been well documented and efficient, particularly in the form of exercises, drills, and simulations, but that civilian coordination has been less observed; seeing how USAID, JICA, and similar Australian organizations is harder to see, he noted. He recalled the cooperation of the Quad in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami and suggested that the actions stress the recovery and reconstruction stages.

Pamela Kennedy then introduced her American perspective on Quad cooperation in disaster response. She started by stating her overall argument that Quad cooperation is indeed in the U.S.’s interest, but that it might not be the best time for such cooperation. She argued that, if it does become a good time, it might be best to embed the Quad in a preexisting mechanism. Kennedy continued by discussing several complications possibly inhibiting the U.S. from Quad cooperation. First is the complication of overlapping civilian and military activities in HA/DR, particular in the U.S. military’s case because of its speed and global presence. She also outlined issues with funding, namely in that the U.S. either routinely underestimates the amount of funding needed for disaster response or is hesitant to acknowledge the rising costs of disasters. Kennedy added another point of complication: the current White House is trying to decrease American contributions to HA/DR based on the false presumption of the U.S. being overburdened by disaster-response expenses. She expressed her concern with antagonizing China. She mentioned the ASEAN Coordinating Center for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management, AHA Center, as a good example for the Quad. She then suggested policy recommendations. First, the U.S. should raise its own budget for humanitarian assistance rather than passing multiple supplemental funding bills every year. Second, the U.S. should convene a Quad dialogue to explore whether the Quad should take place as a standalone format or as an embedded mechanism. Finally, the U.S. should discuss Quad cooperation with these existing multilateral mechanisms like the AHA center.

Tatsumi asked Stevenson, Vasudeva, and Kennedy their opinion on how each government would respond to a broader definition of disaster relief incorporating risk mitigation and risk

management. Kennedy replied that the U.S. would be in support of that since OFDA already does work on risk reduction, risk mitigation, prevention, and community resilience. Vasudeva answered that disaster management is included within India’s broader definition, but India is focusing on the emergency response now. Therefore, she is not sure whether right now would be the time for that. Stevenson had a similar argument to Vasudeva’s. She added that if four countries expand the scope of the Quad, it could become harder to manage; therefore it might be better to keep the scope to the emergency response phase.

Tatsumi then opened the floor to questions. Leo Bosner, a retired FEMA specialist and lecturer in Japan and Taiwan, asked two questions. The first was about Taiwan’s participation to the Quad. The second was what benefits the four countries can get from sharing their experiences and information. Stevenson answered that there hadn’t been enough study on the Taiwan question, so the Quad itself could possibly be best suited to pursuing an answer to Taiwan’s role. On the second question, she said that though it might not be advertised to the public, there is significant sharing of information and capabilities with JICA, Australian agencies, and others from around the world. Kennedy followed, answering the question. She said if the goal is effective disaster relief, then the more the merrier. Also, it would be a benefit for Taiwan to have another way to participate in the international community. For the second question, she mentioned FEMA and its work so far. Jibiki said that it is difficult to include Taiwan now and the four countries need to think about governmental relationships because Taiwan does not have official diplomatic relationships with many countries. He continued that the three countries excluding Japan share a common understanding of incident command systems, so it might be difficult for Japan to exchange information or learn lessons from them.

A woman in the audience asked two questions: one was the definition of good coordination and the second was to clarify whether the U.S. is overpaying the budget on HA/DR or not. Kennedy clarified on the second question, saying that the U.S. is spending above the budgeted amounts for HA/DR and Congress passes supplemental spending. Thus, it is not that the U.S. is spending too much on HA/DR. For the other question, Vasudeva responded that good coordination has to be based on looking at the same data. Stevenson agreed with Vasudeva and added that effective assistance is “smooth and effective, fast response which actually responds to needs and ... doesn’t double up,” as well as not staying longer in the disaster-stricken area than necessary. Jibiki said good coordination must be organized prior to disasters, and that’s the reason the Japanese government emphasizes the importance of preparedness.

Polly Nayak wanted to know two things. The first was on how to balance early reaction to disasters and having neighboring countries – China in particular – misconstrue the sudden actions as military actions. The second was if there are other bureaucratic misalignments in the way each of these countries structures its international rescue and disaster assistance that need to be ironed out in advance of the next disaster. Stevenson said that there has been discussion about a communication mechanism regarding the first question and mentioned that Australia’s system is similar to Japan’s for the second question. Vasudeva only replied to the second question, pointing out the Indian military’s prominent role in disaster response as opposed to the U.S. and Japanese cases where there are stronger roles for civilian agencies. Kennedy said that because of difficulty in communication, it will be important to formalize a Quad mechanism. She answered that the U.S. has a very complex system for responding to disasters. Jibiki responded that ASEAN countries are preparing their own procedures to accommodate military organizations.

Tatsumi wrapped up the panel by thanking researchers’ tackling new issues and thanking the audience for attending.