

1-31-2023

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Recommended Citation

De Silva, Shakthi (2023) "Quad 2.0: Australia's reaction to the 'China threat'," *Journal of Strategic and Global Studies*: Vol. 6: No. 1, Article 2.

DOI: 10.7454/jsgs.v6i1.1103

Available at: <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/jsgs/vol6/iss1/2>

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Quad 2.0: Australia's Reaction To The 'China Threat'

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ABSTRACT

The prevailing scholarly consensus maintains that Australia's rising threat perception of China influenced its decision to re-join the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) in 2017. Although the unilateral initiative does not have a declared policy to inhibit China's influence or curtail China's aggressive behaviour in the Indo-Pacific region, scholars assert that the underlying rationalisation for its resurgence in the present context is due to China's behaviour. The paper tests this hypothesis by examining whether Australia's threat perception of China is manifest in its defence white papers and defence updates from 2000 to 2016. Having reviewed this primary material, the author concludes that Australia's threat perception of China increased over time from the early 2000s. In particular, increased attention to China's activities in the South Asia and Southeast Asia as well as Australia's decision to closely observe the bilateral relationship between the United States and China after 2008, manifests Australia's increased threat perception of China. This is also supported by Lowy Polls between 2000 and 2016. In sum, the paper concludes that Australia's rising threat perception of China appears to have been a major factor influencing its decision to re-join the Quad in 2017.

Keywords : Australia, Foreign Policy, Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, Indo-Pacific, China

1. Introduction

This research paper appraises Australia's threat perception of the People's Republic of China (PRC) by surveying Australian defence white papers and defence updates from 2000-2016. It argues that Australia's assessment that China poses a threat to its national interests is a key variable explaining why it re-joined the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) in 2017 – after leaving the grouping in 2008.

The prevailing scholarly consensus maintains that Australia's rising threat perception of China influenced its decision to re-join the Quad. Although the unilateral initiative does not have a *declared policy* to inhibit China's influence or curtail China's aggressive behaviour in the Indo-Pacific region, scholars assert that the underlying rationalisation for its resurgence in the present context is due to China's behaviour. The paper tests this hypothesis by examining whether Australia's threat perception of China is manifest in its defence white papers and defence updates from 2000 to 2016.

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Australian decision makers opinion on China serves as a significant source of evidence to distil the nation's threat perception of the latter. As acquiring this data is challenging, the author will chiefly utilize Australia's defence white papers from 2000 to 2016 to understand how the state's perception of China shifted over time. In addition, to supplement this analysis, the author also examines polling data and academic publications on Australia-China relations.

The paper defines Australia's national interest as implying the protection of Australia's sovereignty, decision-making autonomy, and territorial integrity. However, it expands this national interest frame of reference to also include regional stability (safeguarding the rules-based order) and maritime security, because the island-continent's sense of security is tied to the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Consequently, adherence to United Nations Law of the Sea Convention and de-escalating bilateral/multi-lateral disputes in the region are also in Australia's interest.

2. Methodology

The hypothesis of this research lies within the probabilistic framework. As the threat perception of Australia's policymakers cannot be quantifiably measured without surveys or personal interviews, the author identifies Australia's threat perception using Australia's defence white papers and updates. In addition, Lowy public polls and secondary literature are utilized to maintain the study's construct validity and internal validity. While Australia's decision to re-join the Quad can be a result of multiple factors; as the initiative is widely considered in literature to be a democratic alliance geared to prevent aggressive PRC behaviour in the Indo-Pacific, this paper argues that Australia's decision to re-join the Quad is predicated on an increase in threat perception of the PRC.

Methodologically this research is qualitative in nature and adopts a positivist ontology. By examining primary and secondary literature it strives to substantiate the proposition that Australia's threat perception of China increased from 2000 to 2017 as manifest, primarily in Australia's defence white papers, polling data and other secondary literature.

3. Results

3.1 The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)

The Quad oscillated from dormancy to animated dynamism between 2007 and 2017. The minilateral initiative is expected to strengthen ties between 'like-minded states' which share

democratic values, reinforce multilateral cooperation to tackle traditional and non-traditional security challenges as well as facilitate discussions on potential measures that can be adopted to balance against the rise of China (Campbell et al, 2011; Tow, 2019, pp.234-244). Official documents state that the Quad strives to uphold a “region that is free, open, inclusive, healthy and anchored by democratic values and unconstrained by coercion...by committing to a free, open rules-based order, rooted in international law” (Quad joint statement, 2021). Although joint statements do not explicitly refer to China, they tend to include references to PRC activities indirectly. The 2021 statement for instance, reads “we will continue to prioritize the role of international law in the maritime domain...and meet challenges to the rules-based international order in the East and South China Seas” (Quad joint statement, 2021).

Consultations between Vice President Dick Cheney of the United States, Prime Minister John Howard of Australia, Prime Minister Abe of Japan, and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India laid the foundation for the mini-lateral’s inception (Rai, 2018). The first Quad summit took place on the side-lines of the ASEAN Regional Forum in 2007 with discussions revolving around humanitarian and disaster relief operations as well as Asia-Pacific military and strategic developments in the backdrop of China’s rise (Jaishankar, 2017; Kliem, 2020). At the time, the initiative was expected to add an extra layer of cooperation to the U.S. bilateral hub and spoke alliance system by bolstering the regional security order as well as help monitor, and where necessary *collectively* counter, aggressive Chinese behaviour in the maritime sphere (Pattanaik, 2016). Australia, however, withdrew from the initiative in 2008 – a year after it was formed – chiefly due to the former Prime Minister’s impression of the PRC (De Silva, forthcoming).

Scholars contend that China’s Belt and Road Initiative spurred the United States and several Asian allies to develop an Indo-Pacific Strategy. In their view, China’s assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region since the early 2010s acted as a stimulant, channelling the centrifugal perspectives of the four members (India, Australia, Japan, and the United States) towards a more centripetal position. In conjunction with the Indo-Pacific Strategy, the United States and its Asian allies also revived the Quad “security platform in opposition to China’s expansionism” (Jung et al, 2021, p. 53). Policy documents from Tokyo, Washington, Canberra, and New Delhi also referenced the salience and synergy of the Indo-Pacific Strategy and the Quad (Jie, 2019). Scholars maintain that both initiatives are driven by the apprehension that China intends to alter the international order to suit its expanding interests and claim contested territory in the South China and East China Seas (ECS) (Medcalf, 2020).

Table 1. Summary of Chinese hostile activities in the ECS and SCS

Date	China's activities in the East China and South China Sea
2009 May	China submits a 'nine-dash line' map in response to submissions made by Malaysia and Vietnam. The nine-dash line occupies almost 2/3 of the South China Sea.
2010 May 15	Chinese maritime law enforcement vessels threaten to fire on Indonesian boats near the Natuna islands within Indonesia's EEZ.
2010 September 07	Chinese fishing boat collides with two Japanese Coast Guard vessels near the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. China enforces an unofficial embargo on rare earth minerals from Japan in response to the latter's decision to arrest the Chinese crew.
2011 January 14	Chinese fishing vessels and Taiwanese coast guards engage in a standoff near Jinmen islands
2011 February 25	Chinese navy fires shots at Philippine fishing vessels near the Jackson atoll in the Spratly islands
2011 June 01	The Philippines government expresses concern over 5 incursions by the PLA Navy into contested territory between 2010 and 2011
2012 April 08	Philippines and China engage in a standoff over the Scarborough Shoal
2012 September 12	China claims the territorial sea around the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands as part of its territory.
2013	China begins to reclaim land from the Spratly Island chain
2013 November 23	China announces an Air Defence Identification Zone in the East China Sea
2014 May 04	China and Vietnam clash over an oil rig in the South China Sea
2016 February 14	China deploys surface to air missiles on Paracel islands
2016 July 12	The Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague rules in favour of the Philippines against China's nine-dash line claim. Beijing refuses to accept the verdict in contravention to the 'rules-based order'.

compiled using data from CFR (n.a), Crisis Group (n.a) and CSIS (n.a).

Thus, the prevailing scholarly consensus is that the Quad was reinstated as part of a wider conversation over how to manage the rising China threat perception. This paper puts this hypothesis to the test by examining whether Australia's threat perception of the PRC intensified between 2008 when it left the Quad till 2017 when it decided to rejoin the mini-lateral initiative.

3.2 China as Australia's bona fide friend?

Australia and China emerged from the Second World War on opposing ends of the spectrum. Australia had begun to shift allegiances from the United Kingdom to the United States by the 1940s whereas China by 1949 was under a Communist regime. The Korean war further alienated the two as China and Australia fought on opposing ends. Mackerras (2014, p.226) argues that “though no war was ever declared, the fact that troops from Australia and the U.S. fought on one side, while Chinese forces were on the other, shaped a very hostile relationship for a generation”. This trajectory continued after the war ended with the signing of the ANZUS treaty which “focused anti-China thinking and allowed the Americans to keep Australia and New Zealand in line with them on China” (Andrews, 1985, p. 163).

Relations between Australia and China markedly shifted following the U.S decision to leverage ties with China to distance the latter from the Soviet Union. Pitty argues that the US-USSR convergence “created a new geopolitical situation...[revising] many presumptions of early Cold War years, when Australia’s regional relations with Asia were largely shaped by fear of China” (2003, p. 49). The USSR’s invasion of Afghanistan further solidified ties as China, the U.S. and Australia found themselves on the same side condemning Soviet action as an act of aggression. (Mackerras, 2014, p.238). Australia, under the Whitlam government in the early 1970s, established full diplomatic relations with China. By 2007, China had also overtaken Japan as Australia’s single most important export market (Kizekova, 2021, p. 198).

Scholars contend that apprehensions of *Communism* were replaced by a new ‘Changst’ by the 1990s. McCarthy and Song, (2018) among others, define this as the concern among local Australians of the inflow of Chinese students and investments into Australian companies which is believed to be gravely affecting its social fabric and internal security. China’s rapid economic growth, at times at a rate above 10% per annum, and its concomitant increase in defense expenditure to combat ‘external threats’ also contributed to the ‘Changst’.

Bilateral ties worsened following allegations of Chinese donations to Australian parliamentarians directed at manipulating their voting patterns. (Kizekova, 2021, p. 201). Kent argues that the renewed angst of the PRC is based on “China’s increased military capabilities, albeit initially modified by a belief that China’s intentions were non-threatening” (1996, p. 371). In sum, the “anxiety, uncertainty and fear in response to China’s economic rise” has fueled a China threat theory. According to Liu this notion assumes that “China cannot and will not rise peacefully, that it actively seeks to subvert the West and the current world, and that the West must restrict China’s rise to prevent serious global consequences”

(2022, pp. 2-3). Australia also undertook several activities which were construed by China as hostile measures. This included banning the Huawei telecommunications company from its communications network and accusing China of spying on Australia (Johanson et al, 2019, p. 398). Thus, secondary literature appears to point to Australia's increased threat perception of China, among other secondary factors, as reflective of why it re-joined the Quad in 2017. The next section will explore whether this holds true by examining Australia's defense white papers and updates.

3.3 The Australian government's defense publications

3.3.1 2000: Our Future Defence Force

Australia's defence white paper titled 'Our future defence force' (2000) emphasized the need to stabilize and enhance Australia's bilateral and multilateral ties with the region. The white paper affirms that prospects for Australia's ties with each of the major powers operating in the region – India, Japan, China, and the United States – are stable and positive and that Australia views the regional strategic environment in a positive light.

Nevertheless, it also underscores the possibility that confrontation between regional great powers is likely. The report extensively discusses two strategic contexts where confrontation is most probable – both situations involve the PRC. The two locations are the Indo-China border and the South China Sea (SCS). Moreover, the report argues that India's nuclear capability can destabilize regional politics and the prevailing security architecture. The report notes that India's nuclear capability may spur increased investments into land-based military forces and new defence technologies which may be construed in Beijing as indicative of India's hostile intentions. It argues that the peace prevailing between India and China is relatively weak, particularly after the 1962 Chinese invasion of India's territory, and that the unresolved border is a potential hotspot. In that sense, the impetus for destabilizing the regional security architecture is placed on New Delhi *and* Beijing.

With regard to the South China Sea, the report states that the presence of a "number of security issues such as conflicting claims in the South China Sea" (p. 20) may generate tensions between claimants. However, it does not explicitly lay blame on China's island building activities or identify China's behaviour as the main cause for the rise in tensions. The report alludes to the presence of conflicting claims and concludes by outlining the need to "carefully" handle relations so that "regional security is maintained" (p.20).

In relation to Australia's bilateral relationship with Beijing, the report determines that successive Australian governments place a "high priority on working with China to deepen and develop dialogue on strategic issues" (p. 37). The decision to deepen ties on *strategic issues* is reflective of Australia's belief that Beijing's activities will not jeopardize Australia's national interests. Moreover, the decision to enhance *strategic ties* with Beijing, a country which does not share Canberra's liberal values or democratic traditions, is also emblematic of Australia's desire to expand ties with Asia's rising regional power.

3.3.2 2003 Defence Update

The 2003 defence update chiefly focussed on terrorism. The 2001 September attacks against the United States and 2002 Bali bombings feature heavily in the report alongside the threat posed by the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Thus, the possibility that WMD may fall into the hands of terrorists and the potential threat of Armageddon as a result is a theme running throughout the update.

The report was released prior to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 but it indicates the necessity of supporting counterterrorism operations conducted by the United States in the Middle East. The report adds that major power relations remain "stable" and only identifies the Korean peninsula as a major flashpoint. The report ends by noting that despite the terror attacks on USA, it still remains the dominant hegemon and that it will maintain its primacy in the Asian regional order, at least "for the near term". The update, consequently, does not discuss China in any detail.

3.3.3 2005 Defence Update

The 2005 defence update marks a sharp shift in Australia's perception of China. The report, in detailed fashion, outlines the degree to which China's strategic influence is growing in Asia. It states that China's desire to secure a stable flow of resources via the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) and protect its market will shape its approach to regional affairs. Although how China intends to protect its SLOC and markets is not discussed, the report clarifies that China may adopt coercive measures if its national interests cannot be met. The need to *accommodate* China within the global economic architecture is therefore a fundamental point discussed in the report.

It adds that the “pace and scale of China’s defence modernization” (Australian Defence Update, 2005) may engender apprehensions among other Asian states as they may be uncertain of China’s future regional goals. In order to ameliorate such anxieties, the report calls for China to develop its military in a “transparent” manner and ensure that its “capability decisions remain consistent with its legitimate security needs” (Australian Defence Update, 2005). In that sense, the report seems to accommodate and welcome China’s economic rise while also urging Beijing to demonstrate transparency in its intentions in order to ameliorate suspicions among regional states.

The report states that Taiwan can be a “source of friction between China and the United States” – a theatre which was not explicitly discussed in previous documents (Australian Defence Update, 2005). The addition of a potentially new theatre of conflict as well as the request made from Australia to demonstrate transparency in articulating regional goals and intentions exhibits the rising apprehension among Australians towards China. Nevertheless, the wording suggests that Australia deems the potential for China to behave aggressively to still remain low. For example, the report explicitly states that “Australia is unlikely to face any direct conventional military threats in the near future” (Australian Defence Update, 2005).

Australia asserts that the global community “needs China to pursue its interests within a framework of integration into the global economic system” (Australian Defence Update, 2005). This phrase also outlines Australia’s desire to influence China’s foreign policy using international regimes and institutional structures. By socializing China within the existing economic architecture, the report seems to suggest that China’s more aggressive tendencies can be mitigated provided that its immediate interests are realized. The report also testifies that the Pacific Ocean’s peace and stability will be maintained by Japan, South Korea, and Australia alongside the United States. It, thereby, consciously excludes China from this responsibility. This can be an indication that Australia is gradually moving away from calling for China to be a ‘responsible stakeholder’ in the international community. Overall, although the report does not point to China as the most significant threat to the region it does indicate a gradual increase in threat perception of China.

3.3.4 2007 Defence Update

The 2007 report ascribes to several points made in the 2005 report. It begins by noting that the relationships between the major powers, including USA and China are relatively “good”

which, consequently, increases prospects for a stable Asian regional order. The update states that Australia does not “believe that any regional power is eager to see fundamental geo-strategic change” (Australian Defence Update, 2007). Both statements reflect Australia’s conviction that Beijing does not intend to upend the regional security architecture. Nevertheless, these positive indictments are balanced by assertions that China’s economic rise carries significant implications to the economic and security order in Asia.

The report marks a shift from the Neo-Liberal theoretical lens, which was adopted in previous reports – notably the 2005 update. For the first time in Australian defence publications, this report identifies “strategic competition” as a likely outcome irrespective of the high level of economic cooperation characterizing relations between the United States and China. In that sense, the report appears to draw on Offensive Realist tenets – notably Mearsheimer (2001) who claims that when a regional state’s power potential grows its interests correspondingly increases to the point where it attempts to shape the regional architecture in a way that benefits its continued sustenance and strength.

Analogous to the 2005 update, this report also underscores the importance for China to be transparent about the intentions of its military modernization on the grounds that it may otherwise engender “misunderstanding and instability” (Australian Defence Update, 2007). In addition, the report justifies the need for Australia to “retain an edge in leading military capabilities” as the regional security architecture is “becoming increasingly sophisticated” with the deployment of military forces by several Asian powers. Thus, the 2007 update appears to reiterate several points noted in the 2005 update and expresses concern over China’s military modernization activities. It also marks a significant shift from previous reports by dropping the emphasis on socializing China to the existing international order.

3.3.5 Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030

The 2009 defence white paper emphasizes the growing uncertainty of China’s regional aspirations and discusses the strategic and economic implications of its rise under a separate section. This chapter also notes how the PRC’s military modernization can destabilize regional security if Beijing does not maintain transparency of its force structure and intentions. The report underscores the changing power polarity in the region, noting that China will “be the strongest Asian military power, by a considerable margin” (Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century, 2009, p. 34).

In addition, the report pays significant focus on China's growing influence in South Asia, which was not evident in previous reports. This clearly demonstrates that Australia has begun to track China's engagements and influence more closely in the East and South Asian regions. For the first time China is also referenced in the Defence minister's preface. The minister writes that the "biggest reason" justifying a new report is the "rise of China". The report also states that there is a "concerning possibility of growing confrontation between some of these powers" on the basis of unresolved geopolitical and geo-economic issues (p. 33).

The report calls for China "to develop an even deeper stake in the global economic system" and "appreciate the need to make a strong contribution to strengthening the regional security environment and global rules-based order" (p.34). It appears that the government backtracks by adopting a Neo-Liberal position, assuming that China can still be integrated into the prevailing international system and that it would uphold the rules-based order. Furthermore, while the report eschews discussing the degree to which China's island building activities destabilize regional security, the appeal to adhere to the 'rules-based order' is emblematic of Australia's attempt to shape China's foreign policy towards a more non-aggressive trajectory as a 'responsible stakeholder' in the international system.

3.3.6 2013 Defence White Paper

The emphasis on China's military modernization and its ability to reshape the strategic architecture of the region is continued in the 2013 defence white paper. The report notes that between 2000 and 2013, China's "defence spending increased by over 140 percent in real terms" (Australian Defense White Paper, 2013, p.9). By drawing attention to several statistics, the report indicates the possibility that China's military is reshaping the regional security order in contravention to the 'rules-based order'. It argues that "the size of China's economy, combined with its domestic defence industry and ambitious military planning has enabled its official defence spending to deliver significant capabilities including modern submarines and cyber capabilities" (p. 15). Thus, the likelihood that China's great power ambitions may involve several infringements of the prevailing order is discussed prominently in this report.

The report, however, argues that the increased attention on China's military developments and economic engagements in the region does not imply that the former sees the latter as an adversary. For instance, it declares that "Australia welcomes China's economic rise" (p. 11)

and underpins this by noting the contributions China has made to deliver its people from poverty and enhance economic trade with Asian nations.

As China has failed to provide sufficient justification for its military developments or adopted a transparent position concerning its economic engagements with Asian nations the report maintains an ambivalent attitude towards China. Moreover, it appears to adopt an Offensive Realist stance – by claiming that an increase in China’s economic capability will inevitably lead to the expansion of the military capacity of the PLA. Finally, in order to maintain regional stability and peace the report calls for “the United States and China to grow their political and strategic relationship to match their deep economic integration” (p.10).

In sum, the shift in perception, visible since the 2005 defence update, appears to intensify in the 2013 report. From a Neo-Liberal position (in the 2005 report), more recent publications appear to adopt an Offensive Realist conclusion by claiming that China’s increasing economic growth may entail hostile behaviour, potentially involving the upending of the rules-based order. The decision by the Australian government to exclude China from the list of ‘responsible stakeholders’ is also noteworthy. Furthermore, in the 2009 report, China is discussed under a separate section and its activities in South Asia are documented in detail. These factors convey the significance which Australia has attached to monitoring China’s behaviour in the region. Although none of the reports publish details of China’s hostile activities in the SCS or ECS (see table 01), each report 1) argues that tensions are escalating in the SCS and 2) calls for the adherence of international law.

3.3.7 2016 Defence White Paper

The 2016 defence white paper justifies the necessity of re-examining the Indo-Pacific strategic landscape on the basis that “territorial disputes between claimants in the East China and South China Seas have created uncertainty and tension in our region” (Australian Defense White Paper, 2016, p. 30). The two seas feature significantly throughout the report. It begins by underscoring the fact that “as China grows, it will continue to seek greater influence within the region” (p.42). Among the most important drivers that will shape Australia’s security environment according to the document is the fact that “China’s navy is now the largest in Asia.”

In relation to the South China Sea, the report contends that China’s “unprecedented pace and scale of land reclamation activities” coupled with the “use of artificial structures in the South

China Sea for military purposes” has exacerbated tensions with other claimant states (p. 58). Noting the landmark decision provided by the Permanent Court of Arbitration, the report documents that China’s 9-dash line claim is invalidated by the Court’s ruling and consequently has no legitimate basis. The report adds that “Australia also opposes the assertion of associated territorial claims and maritime rights which are not in accordance with international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)” (p. 58). This statement is particularly significant as it paints China as a violator of the ‘rules-based order’ which Australia has repeatedly stated is in its national interest. In that sense, by challenging China’s claims and supporting the ruling by the Court, Australia positions itself against China’s behavior in the South China Sea.

This stance is further reinforced in relation to the East China Sea (ECS). The report argues that “China’s 2013 unilateral declaration of an Air Defence Identification Zone in the East China Sea...caused tensions to rise” (p. 61). China is thus, identified as the chief instigator behind the tensions among the claimant states. It adds that “Australia is opposed to any coercive or unilateral actions to change the status quo in the East China Sea” (p.61). Thus, the fact that Beijing’s unilateral activities in the East China Sea have been singled out and criticized as undermining peace and stability points to Australia’s perception of China as violating international law and engendering instability in the region.

Unlike previous reports (notably reports prior to 2008), the 2016 defence white paper does not reinforce positive impressions of China. While it mentions the need to build bilateral ties, the report asserts that “our strategic interests may differ in relation to some regional and global security issues” (p.44). Accordingly, the 2016 report clearly portrays the rising threat perception of China among Australian policymakers. In that sense, charting each of the reports on a continuum showcases how Australia’s threat perception of China increased incrementally each year as evident by the defense white papers and updates published since 2000. Thus, our examination of primary literature appears to validate the scholarly assessment that Australia’s threat perception of China may have contributed to its decision to join the Quad.

4. Measuring Public Opinion – Lowy Poll data

Polling data confirms the trajectory that Australia’s policymakers adopted towards China. 2008 Lowy polls reflect the public’s relatively positive perception of China. Great Britain and other European states were among those viewed most positively while China ranked above

50% on a scale of 0-100 (Hanson, 2008, p.3). Almost 80% of all respondents however, opposed Chinese foreign investments aimed at buying a controlling stake in major Australian companies which echoes the underlying sense of apprehension that Australians carry towards China (Hanson, 2008, p.6). Among the United States, Japan, India and Russia, China was also the least trusted country by the respondents in the 2008 poll. Nevertheless, only 46% of respondents maintained that Australia should join other countries in limiting China's influence in the world which demonstrates a relative lack of apprehension towards China's regional ambitions (Hanson, 2008, p.8).

In the 2012 poll, Australia's perception towards China noticeably shifted. Although 95% of respondents stated that China is a leading power in Asia, 52% registered their reaction as uncomfortable with this trend (Hanson, 2012, p.13). The 2018 Lowy report polls conducted in 2017-8 expresses this shift in perception in starker terms. Over 70% of all respondents stated that the Australian government is allowing too much investment from China (Oliver, 2018, p.10). The threat from China's growing power also falls within the top 10 growing threats which respondents identified in the 2018 Lowy poll (Oliver, 2018, p.23).

In sum, polling data by Lowy also reinforce the conclusion derived through our examination of Australia's defense white papers and updates.

5. Conclusion

Thus, having reviewed defense white papers and updates from 2000 to 2016, this paper concludes that Australia's threat perception of China increased over time. In 2000 the defense white paper viewed Australia's strategic environment in a positive light and maintained the necessity of enhancing *strategic ties* with China. The 2005 report marked a shift in perception arguing that China's military modernization may augment tensions with regional nations. Nevertheless, the report insisted on the necessity of accommodating China's rise and integrating it in the global economic and security architecture. By 2007 Australia began to assert the possibility of strategic competition between USA and China. The 2009 report marked a significant shift in emphasis on China. China's engagements with South and Southeast Asian nations were discussed in a separate chapter. The 2016 report continued the previous reports focus but directed specific attention to China's activities in the ECS and SCS as creating instability and tension among claimant states. China was also branded as a violator of the 'rules-based order'. Thus, by assessing the degree of attention given to China, particularly its military modernization and activities in the Asian region, Australia appears to

have developed a degree of apprehension towards Beijing. This is starkly manifest in the 2016 report which directly discusses Beijing's role in violating maritime laws and encroaching on contested territory in the SCS and ECS. In sum, the paper concludes that Australia's rising threat perception of China appears to have influenced its decision to re-join the Quad in 2017.

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