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**The influence of domestic-level factors on system-level pressures for alignment:
The case of Australia and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue - 2007, 2008, 2017**

MA Thesis

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Tartu, 2021

I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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The influence of domestic-level factors on system-level pressures for alignment: The case of Australia and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue - 2007, 2008, 2017

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Tartu, Estonia 2021

Abstract

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (hereinafter the Quad) is an alignment between Australia, India, Japan and the United States of America against a perceived threat to a rules-based order and of a rising China. With the majority of its early development occurring in 2007, the Quad ceased in 2008 due to Australia's withdrawal, but was renewed in 2017. Given that a realist understanding of alignment formation posits that balancing occurs as a response to system-level factors, such as an imbalance of power or threat, and an expectation that a continued or even growing imbalance of threat implies continued balancing efforts, this fluctuation in Australia's alignment decisions in a short time period presents the puzzle of this study.

The aim of this thesis is, therefore, to explain the deviation in Australia's alignment decisions in the Quad (from alignment (2007), to withdrawal (2008), and back (2017) to alignment) in the face of a perception of continuous presence of threat from China (i.e. of a continued imbalance of threat). To do so, this study turns to balance of threat for an analysis of the system-level pressures contributing to Australia's alignment decisions; and a variant of realist thought through the works of neoclassical realists and other scholars to perform an analysis of the impact and influence of specific domestic-level factors (deemed domestic-level costs for the purpose of this thesis) on the perceived cost-benefit of external alignment by Australian decision makers. This study thereby applies these theoretical frameworks to an analysis of Australia's alignment decisions in the context of the Quad during the period in question, through a combination of document analysis and qualitative content analysis.

This thesis finds that while the perception of China's threat remained consistent and high, it was changes at the domestic-level that triggered the back-and-forth of Australian political leaders' alignment decisions. With these findings, this study contributes to highlighting the importance in taking domestic-level factors into consideration in the examination of balancing behaviour and alignment decisions, as well as a deeper understanding of alignment formation, and the Quad itself.

Keywords: Balancing, balance of threat, domestic-level factors, alignment, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, system-level pressures to balance, neoclassical realism, Australia, China

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List of Abbreviations

GFC – Global Financial Crisis

RBA – The Reserve Bank of Australia

MP – Member of Parliament

MPs – Members of Parliament

1. Introduction

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (hereinafter the Quad), which comprises of Australia, India, Japan and the United States of America, is an alignment focused on and purposed towards promoting freedom and the rule of law, and supporting and ensuring a “free and open”, “prosperous”, and “rules-based order in the” Indo-Pacific region (Buchan & Rimland, 2020, p. 2-4; Envall, 2019, p. 2-6). Although the earliest origins of the Quad are rooted in a cooperative effort between the four member states to provide tsunami relief in 2004, it grew into a more significant, yet informal, grouping in 2007 through the initiative of Prime Minister Shino Abe of Japan (Envall, 2019; Sharma, 2010). It is generally understood that the Quad is purposed towards an increased strategic partnership between the members, as well as facilitating cooperation on issues requiring security cooperation and maintaining ‘balance’ in the region¹ (Sharma 2010; p. 238-239). In this way, the Quad has largely been perceived as being purposed towards acting as a balancing or containment mechanism against China by a variety of observers, such as those at different levels of state and political leadership as well as analysts (Buchan & Rimland, 2020, Envall, 2019; Pan, 2018).

The first iteration of the Quad led to tensions between China, the Quad itself, and its individual members. China issued formal diplomatic protests to each member state (Nicholson, 2007) “based on its fear that the four countries were ganging up against China in a security alliance” (Sharma, 2010; p. 239)². While Australia, and other Quad members, repeatedly reassured Beijing that China was not under threat (Nicholson, 2007; Sharma,

¹ For more of an overview of the Quad, see (for example): Envall, David. "The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue: Towards an Indo-Pacific Order?." (2019); Graham, E., Pan, C., Hall, I., Kersten, R., Zala, B., & Percy, S. (2018). Debating the quad. Strategic & Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University; or, Sharma, A. (2010). The quadrilateral initiative: an evaluation. *South Asian Survey*, 17(2), 237-253.

² The question of whether the Quad should considered a strategy of ‘balance’ against China, and if it is essentially a containment strategy for the increasingly rising China power is one of much debate (Buchan & Rimland 2020; Sharma, 2010).

2010), China's distrust continued until Australia's withdrawal from the group in the first half of 2008, upon which the Quad ceased. Nearly a decade later, however, the Quad has been revitalized with all members committing to its reformation with the issue of joint statements during the 2017 ASEAN Summits (Rej, 2018). Since then, Australia, and the other Quad members have participated in a number of semi-regular summits, military drills, cooperative initiatives, and information exchanges that have only increased in frequency and formality (Buchan & Rimland, 2020). During which, the sentiment by outside observers that the Quad exists as a response to a Chinese threat has only grown. This means that, within a decade, Australia has at multiple points in time, decisively changed its decision to externally align in the face of a continuous a perception of Chinese threat, from alignment (2007), to withdrawal (2008), and again to alignment (2017). This pattern represents the puzzle the present study aims to address.

The existing literature on the Quad and the decisions of its members to align is rather limited, although there have been a number of academics and policy analysts who have looked at it as a phenomenon of interest. Academic studies that have been published on the Quad tend towards an examination of the relevance and future potential of the Quad's strategic value as a group (Sharma, 2010; Singh & Teo, 2020); and concerning the strategic interests of the individual members in the context the Quad (Jie 2019; Lee, 2016; Wilkins, 2011). More, however, has been written on the Quad by policy analysts and within the context of policy reports and briefing papers (see, for example: Envall, 2019; Hanada, 2018; Wilkins, 2018). These documents, in turn, offer a different focus, and offer an examination into China's response to the Quad (Buchan & Rimland, 2020, Jie, 2019; Spagnol, 2020) and provide a deeper understanding of the Quad, in terms of its purpose, and the motivations that underline its existence as a whole and from the perspectives of individual members (Tow, 2019; Eisentraut & Gaens, 2012; Buchan & Rimland 2020).

Two common threads appear throughout this literature on the Quad, however, the first is a focus on the Quad during and after 2017, where it is headed and its potential (Buchan & Rimland, 2020; Envall, 2019; Hanada, 2018). While the second is a pattern of critiques concerning the lack of exacting details observers are able to pin down about the Quad,

which results in studies that look to define the goals and exact nature of the arrangement itself (Buchan & Rimland, 2020; Lee, 2016; Sharma, 2010; Singh & Teo, 2020; Wilkins, 2011). This has left a gap in the literature wherein the beginning and 2008 cessation of the Quad, and crucially Australia's role in it, as well as the factors influencing Australia's alignment decision-making are left unexamined beyond its implications for the future, and cursory overviews for the purposes of introduction. The purpose of this thesis is to address a part of this gap, and to provide a deeper understanding of Australia's variation in alignment decisions – first joining, then departing, and then re-joining the Quad. Thus, the research question this thesis aims to answer is: What explains Australia's alignment decisions vis-à-vis the first formation, cessation and reformation of the Quad over a short period of time, despite the fact that the perceived threat posed by China has been continuously present?

In order to answer this question, this study draws on realist accounts of balancing. It draws on balance of threat theory, and the influence of domestic level factors. To do so, the study brings in an element of neoclassical realism, along with the works of other scholars such as Barnett and Levy (1991) to examine two specific domestic-level factors; the perception of the domestic economy and electoral concerns, which together are termed domestic-level costs. In the context of this theoretical framework, this study hypothesizes that the reason for Australia's decisions is that if domestic-level costs are high, a perception of threat does not lead to external alignment decisions, whereas if domestic-level costs are low, a perception of threat leads to external alignment. This means that domestic-level costs act as an intervening variable³ by modifying the impact of system-level factors (i.e. threat). Thereby, this study attempts to explain Australia's alignment decisions by taking into account the domestic-level factors occurring within the periods in question – 2007, 2008, and 2017, juxtaposed against the system-level factor of Australia's perception of China's threat. Doing so enable this study to account not only for Australia's puzzling alignment decisions, leading to the unsteady trajectory of the Quad, but also to assess the relative

³ Intervening variables are composed of concepts or phenomena that are believed to mediate and/or modify the independent variable's effect over the object of study (Dawood, 2016).

explanatory power of system-level and domestic-level factors in explaining the balancing behaviour of states.

This thesis consists of three chapters; the first presents the theoretical frameworks utilized to explain the events under consideration and outlines the system and domestic-level variables and indicators being taken into account. The second chapter lays out the method applied to the empirical study itself, and provides deeper detail of the case and data selection, and the third chapter presents both the data and its interpretation, examined by year, to paint a full picture of Australia's alignment decisions at three moments of time and the conditions that explain these choices, with reference to domestic-level factors (i.e. the perceived condition of the domestic economy and electoral concerns) and at the system-level, i.e. Australia's perception of China's threat. This is then followed by the final conclusions of the thesis.

2. Theoretical Framework: Balance of threat and the influence of domestic-level factors on balancing

This chapter of the thesis explains the concepts of alliances and alignment, and presents balance of power and balance of threat theories as explanations for alliances and alignment that have a focus on system-level pressures. Followed by an introduction of neoclassical realism to highlight domestic-level factors in explaining alignment decisions. The first section of this chapter will provide both an overview and more detailed specifications of the alliance and alignment concepts to offer clarification on how the Quad itself can be understood in relation to the literature. The second section turns from conceptualizations to theoretical explanations and introduces and examines different 'balancing' theories, grounded in neo-realist thinking and focused on the system-level of analysis, for an understanding of under which system-level conditions alliances and alignments occur. The third section introduces neoclassical realism, as a variant of realist thought, and focuses on the domestic-level of analysis in order to introduce and provide an explanation of how domestic-level conditions are both important, and mediate system-level pressures (to align); as well as some academics outside the neoclassical realist approach but whom have

predominately emphasized the role of domestic conditions for alignment behaviour and heavily feature in the work of neoclassical realists. This third section also provides further understanding and structure to the selection of the domestic-level variables of this thesis, and is immediately followed by an explanation of those variables. Together, these theoretical approaches will provide the backdrop for this thesis, and the examination of Australia's alignment decisions in the context of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and aim to provide a structured context to understand the phenomenon.

2.1 Alliances

When exploring the dynamics underpinning Australia's alignment decisions in the context of the Quad, it is necessary to first conceptualize the phenomenon of interest – the Quad itself – and ask whether and how it fits into the existing understanding of alliances and alignments. Often, IR literature ascribes that a security cooperation between states, especially where there is a military dimension and occurs in the face of a threat, is a form of alliance (Gärtner, 2001; Modelski 1963; Walt, 1990; Weitsman, 1998; McGowan & Rood, 1975), yet an alliance conceptualization may not be the most fitting for the Quad, thus, this thesis turns first to an examination of alliances and then to alignments. Looking first to alliances, it is clear that an “alliance”, as a concept, is both a central and consistently present locus within the topic of international relations (Wilkins, 2012). The topic of alliances, what they are and how they come to be, is a wide ranging branch of literature that stems from the earliest centuries. The concept of state relationships within the context of international relations has been recorded as far back as 3rd BCE (Wilkins, 2012, p. 55) and has continued to be a subject of great importance throughout time, with figures such as Thucydides, Machiavelli and Sun Tzu weighing in on alliances, on what powers and sway allies should or should not be granted, and what constitutes a preferable or prosperous arrangement (Walt, 1985).

As an empirical phenomenon, alliances and alignments come in many forms. While alliances have been of central importance to IR throughout all of history, there has never been a single ‘one’ accepted definition of the concept itself (Bergsmann, 2001, p. 25). Compounding this issue is the fact that many conceptualisations of alliance are so loose⁴ that practically “any security-related communication among or between states” (Wilkins, 2012, p. 55) could be considered to constitute as an alliance, and have, thereby, been suggested by some academics as being more suited for rejection (Wilkins, 2012). This means that it is important and necessary to clarify the characteristics of the concept as it is understood for the purposes of this thesis. To do so, this thesis first turns to an understanding of why alliances are formed, before looking to the characteristics of such groupings.

A number of causes of alliance formation have been theorized. It is postulated that states form alliances to protect themselves from the domination of other states (Walt, 1985, p. viii-5). While it has also been suggested that the “most defining feature of any alliance” is a commitment of military support against some external actor(s) and circumstance (Walt, 2007, p. 157). This has been further specified as a circumstance that furthers respective interests (Walt, 2007, p. 157) or against an external threat (Walt, 2009, p. 89). With those who postulate that ‘threat’⁵ is “inseparable” from the concept of an alliance (Gärtner, 2001, p. 1). Most fundamentally, however, and for the purposes of this thesis, the concept of an alliance is understood to be a formalised grouping of states for the purposes of defence and military cooperation in the face of realist threats. These sentiments are echoed across the literature on alliances, although it, equally often, includes a wide, and occasionally contradictory, array of characteristics. Walt has described alliance arrangements (on separate occasions) as resulting from the existence of a formal security treaty, or the presence of a significant level of security cooperation (Walt, 1985, p. 34); as well as a formal or informal commitment for security cooperation, intended to augment the power, security and/or influence of each member (Walt, 2009, p. 86). Likewise, Weitsman and

⁴ Such as being “a formal or informal relationship of security cooperation between two or more sovereign states” (Wilkins, 2012, p. 59).

⁵ This thesis examines ‘threat’ in more detail in section 2.4.

Modelski have ascribed a formal military collaboration requirement to alliances (1998; 1963), while Bergsman, and Morgenthau, et al., (respectively) propose the requirements of a mutual promise of assistance in the form of substantial resource contributions, and explicit agreements, including explicit legal codification (2001, p. 26; 1985). Yet, this broad array of conceptualisations only serves to complicate the study of alliances, especially as academics have noted that many of these prior understandings were shaped before and during the cold war era, which has led to a transformation of ‘threat’ (Brawley, 2009; Waltz, 2000; Wilkins, 2012; Woodman, 1997). Reflecting this, ‘alignment’, while not adopted universally, has been seen by some as both a solution to ‘alliances’ wide range of meaning and more reflective of the changing reality of threat and how states themselves interact. The following section thereby introduces alignment, and outlines its conceptualisation for the purposes of this thesis.

2.2 Alignments

The tendency for alignments and alliances to be thought of as synonymous or interchangeable makes it especially important to understand why a distinction between the terms is necessary. So what then, is an alignment? It could perhaps be said that an alignment is what an alliance is not, and vis versa. In other words, it could be said that an alignment is a more informal and flexible arrangement and alliances more formal and rigid (Menon, 2007, p. xii). For the purposes of this thesis, an alignment is understood to be an informal, flexible cooperation between states in response to matters of shared importance, including security concerns as well as realist and non-realist threats. There is, similarly to the alliance concept, also a multitude of meanings for alignment, which is made more complex as it is often difficult to understand whether the terms are being used interchangeably or not⁶. For the purposes of this thesis, this section only turns to literature where it is clear that ‘alignment’ is not being used synonymously for ‘alliance’.

⁶ Such as this ambiguous description by Walt: “An alliance (or alignment) is a formal (or informal) commitment for security cooperation between two or more states, intended to augment each member’s power, security, and/or influence” (2009, p. 86).

In the literature on alignment, Thomas Wilkins' *'Alignment, not alliance'* (2012) article, is perhaps the most comprehensive collection of literature on alignment in one short piece. Wilkins himself views alignments as being a multi-faceted concept with a number of archetypes, of which alliances are "merely one subset" (2012, p. 54), in addition to a wide variety of others⁷. Yet, while Wilkins provides an excellent source to gain a foothold in the understanding of an alignment and what makes it different from an alliance, his conceptualisations are almost too narrow, and would, in theory, force the naming of yet another term if, for instance, an arrangement did not quite fit any of his proposed existing archetypes. Seemingly reflecting this issue, most other literature does not break down 'alignment' to such an extent, but rather highlights its relevance in the contemporary era, theorizing that it is a response to a move away from the traditional military alliance paradigm, which has become more pronounced since the end of the Cold War (Woodman, 1997, Wilkins, 2012). Thereby reflecting that alignments in turn have turned away from more realist notions of threat such as military mobilisations, to a more broad conceptualization of threat itself. With alignments incorporating a wider variety of originating triggers such as (for example) non-military threats that present a challenge to the survival of people and states; such as political, economic, social, and environmental threats (such as climate change and resource scarcity) (Martel, 2017, p. 550; Zimmerman, 2014, p. 151).

The multitude of conceptualizations of alignment are, in many ways, as broad as those for alliances. Volker Krause and David Singer define alignments as "any general commitment to cooperation or collaboration [...] across a variety of military, economic, political and cultural issues, their memberships are likely to be overlapping and cross cutting." (2001, p. 16) While Parag Khanna states that "we live in a world of alignment, not alliances" (2008, p. 34) and has described aligning nations as "selectively engaging [...] in ways that best suit their own interests" (2010). While Stephen Walt and Steven R David have been paraphrased by Wilkins to conceptualise alignments as relationships "between two or more

⁷ While Wilkins touches on 'coalitions', 'security communities', 'strategic partnerships', the 'entente', the 'concert', and the 'non-aggression pact' he notes that there are still others. (Wilkins, 2012, p. 69)

states with an expectation of some degree of policy coordination on security issues under certain conditions in the future” (2012, p. 56). In contrast to an “alliance” wherein such broad understandings of the term has led to contradiction and confusion, the broader nature of “alignment” can be seen as being a beneficial and important development that reflects the more flexible nature of alignments. Thereby, whereas an alliance can be said to be a formalised, inflexible grouping of states for the purposes of defence and military cooperation in the face of realist threats, an alignment is an informal, flexible cooperation of states that is not limited to defence or realist threat. Understanding alignment as a broader concept of which an alliance is a subset, means that the existing explanations of alliance formation can be used to explain the more general phenomenon. This possibility opens up a rich literature of explanations of alliance – and thereby alignment – dynamics in order to also explore alignment dynamics, such as the Quad. In other words, the concept of an alignment allows a phenomenon such as the Quad to be studied for the parts of alliance theory it includes, rather than having to fulfil, or be rejected, for the de jure or de facto aspects of alliances that are present or lacking.

The conceptualisation of the Quad for this study is one of an alignment, as the Quad can be seen as being a more informal, fluid and flexible response to the threats presented by China, without being constrained to a military focus – i.e. China still presents a threat although no military attack is seen as being imminent by Australia⁸. While it could be argued that an alliance can be understood in a similar way, there is a trend in the literature in which alliances are still more formal arrangements, and even in their most “informal” versions they are, by definition, more resistant to flexibility (Gärtner, 2001; Morrow, 2000; Menon 2007). This flexibility of alignments is consistently more present in the literature on alignment (Menon, 2007; Snyder, 1997; Wilkins, 2011), wherein to be an informal, changing arrangement would not preclude something from being an alignment, while it is likely to preclude it from being an alliance. Additionally relevant when looking at a

⁸ As stated in Australia’s National Security defence update 2007: “As in 2000, Australia does not face any direct threat to its territory. But although a conventional attack on Australia seems very remote, we must be able to defend ourselves and to be seen by friends and neighbours alike as taking this responsibility seriously. (p. 17)

phenomenon such as the Quad, is the issue that members themselves are averse to the 'alliance' label (Lee, 2016, p. 30) which can be thought to reflect the international ramifications modern (i.e. post-cold war) political leaders believe would follow the application of the term "alliance". This reluctance on the part of policy makers and leaders to call the Quad an alliance, regardless of whether the Quad arrangement appears to meet all of the criteria, reflects two very relevant sentiments – the first being that "the very term 'alliance' may be a growing source of strategic misunderstanding" (Tertrais, as cited in Wilkins, 2012, p. 54); and secondly, the "stark differences" and gap existing between academic insight on alliance theory, and policy maker's beliefs (Walt, 1990, p. ix). Having explained the concept of alignment – in differentiation from the concept of alliance – the next section introduces balance of power and balance of threat.

2.3 Explaining alignment: balancing in realist theory

This thesis explores both the concepts of power and threat as well as their respective balancing theories in order to provide a deeper understanding of the system-level pressures that provide a measure of explanation for alignment formation. While balance of threat may be more suitable to the study of the Quad, this thesis first introduces the balance of power theory, as it provides the basis from which balance of threat stems and there is degree of overlap between power and threat, meaning that an understanding of each is imperative.

Balance-of-power theory begins with the assumption that states are unitary actors who seek their own preservation at minimum, and universal domination at maximum (Waltz, 1979, p. 118). It posits that the international system is anarchical in nature, which means that it is also a self-help system – states must provide for their own security and the means (i.e. power) for this security. It is this concern with domination and security that lies at "the heart" of balance of power theory (Walt, 1985, p. 5). More specifically, balance of power theory postulates that (for example) a singular 'all-powerful' state would be representative of an imbalance in the international system – i.e. other states could be dominated by that singular power. In this hypothetical example, balance of power theory posits that other

states would react by allying with each other⁹ in order to avoid domination by the stronger power (Walt, 1985, p. 5). In this context, balance of power literature has typically equated the term ‘power’ to mean military capability¹⁰ (Hume, 1994; McGowan and Rood, 1975; Walt, 1985; Waltz, 2010). A short essay, by Hume, pointed at as being the start of balance of power theory in the modern era (Nye, 1990, p. 184), illustrate this equation between “power” and military capabilities through its many historical examples¹¹ (1990, p. 154). Likewise, Morgenthau has noted that “most of the wars that have been fought since the beginning of the modern state system have their origin in the balance of power” (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 217).

Faced with an imbalance of power, understood as military capability, states thereby strive to (re-)establish balance. To do so, states typically adopt one of two primary balancing strategies: internal balancing efforts (increasing national power and strength i.e. economic, military, political, etc.), and external balancing efforts (alignments and alliances [the focus of this thesis]) (Waltz, 1979, p. 168). A state increasing its power by either strategy can itself then create an additional imbalance of power, which may then also trigger other states to take similar actions, regardless of whether they wish to or not. This is because any alteration to power distribution (i.e. with the creation of a new alignment or alliance) intrinsically shifts the (im)balance of power and states that do not act accordingly to (re)balance the distribution of capabilities through the system risk the result of falling behind (Waltz, 2010, p. 125-126). It is this preoccupation by states of avoiding

⁹ While balancing is states allying against a greater power; an instance where states ally with a greater power is known as “bandwagoning”. There are other variations on these as well, such as ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ balancing, ‘leash-slipping’ and ‘regional’ balancing (see Walt 2009; Waltz 1979); as well as hedging (see the International Relations of the Asia-Pacific 19, no. 3 (2019) special issue on hedging for a deep overview of the topic).

¹⁰ It may be more accurate to say that the original focus of balance of power literature was on a state’s “warcraft” capabilities – the resources, military power, population, financial and material resources, etc., that a state could utilize to for the “art” of war to either dominate or avoid the domination of another state. These different aspects of “warcraft capabilities” have, however, been distilled over time to a more general “military capabilities”, which still encompasses the non-military resources a state has, but that can be purposed towards military might or “power” .

¹¹ These include an alliance of Asiatic powers arising from a “jealousy” of the increasing force of the Medes and the Persians. As well as several other states and entities historically known as being military powers, such as Sparta, Alexander, and Hannibal, as being the triggers for other countries coming together to “preserve the balance” (Hume, 1994, p. 154).

domination and maintaining their position in the system that is the primary motivation for the balancing behaviour of states.

There are a few shortfalls, however, with primarily focusing on military capabilities as both the standard of what can be considered “power”, and the primary cause of “imbalance” in the international system. As Waltz himself, states:

Power is no longer ‘homogeneous’ [...] Military muscle does not guarantee political influence. Economic giants can be militarily weak, and military strength may not be able to obscure economic weakness. Countries can exert political influence even when they have neither military nor economic strength. (Waltz, 2010, p. 130).

Waltz also posits that the reality of nuclear capabilities have intrinsically changed the balance of world power by raising the bar in terms of the military capabilities that other states must obtain to reach the upper echelons of power (2010, p. 181). This correlation between nuclear power and power, presents another problem as it indirectly represents power as something that can never be lost once a state achieves the nuclear stage, looking to Russia, however – widely considered a former superpower – shows this is not at all the case. These critiques showcase why framing balancing in terms of power alone, is flawed. It is due to these shortfalls that some academics have begun to move away from the balance of power theory to balance of threat, which broadens the explanatory available by reflecting the more nuanced international relations dynamics of the modern era. The following section introduces and provides more insight into both balance of threat, and the concept of threat itself.

2.4 From balancing power to balancing threat in realist theory: the role of perception

As mentioned in the previous sections, according to realist theory ‘threat’ has been said to be one of the most fundamental causes of alliance or alignment formation (Gärtner, 2001; Walt, 2009). The concept of threat in the context of balancing, however, has mostly only been taken indirectly into consideration by many theorists, or presented in the context of

military force¹² (Hume, 1994, Waltz, 2010). In short, whereas Waltz views threat as power, and power alone, there are those who suggest that ‘threat’ is a separate and distinct concept; and that it is these ‘threats’, and thereby what states perceive as a threat, which are most important to alignment formation.

Walt is an excellent starting point to highlight both the importance of threat, what it is, and how perception plays into it. It is important, however, to first begin an examination of balance of threat by noting that the theory is essentially a “reformulation” (Walt, 1990, p. viii) or “modification” (Priess, 1996, p. 148) of balance of power theory. What is meant by this is that balance of threat also contends with the quandary of how states respond to imbalances in the international system. It does not challenge the overarching balancing theory – that states act to counter imbalances in the international system – but instead seeks to expand beyond singularly focusing on the concept of power, and thereby also the role of power. Walt postulates that framing balancing in terms of ‘power’ rather than ‘threat’ is flawed as it ignores the other factors considered by political figures in identifying potential threats (Walt, 1985, p. 8). Thus, according to Walt, “it is more accurate to say that states will ally with or against the most *threatening* power” (emphasis in original) (Walt, 1985, p. 8-9). Therein, Walt theorises four factors which states take into account when evaluating potential threat: 1) aggregate power; 2) proximity; 3) offensive capability; and 4) offensive intentions¹³. The explanations for each are as follows: aggregate power consists of a state’s total resources, (i.e. population, industrial and military capability, technological prowess etc.); proximity concerns geographic considerations, based on the theory that the ability to project power declines with distance, thus closer states are more threatening; offensive power is (all else equal) a state’s military capabilities; and offensive intentions concerns how aggressive a state is perceived as being (Walt 1985, p. 8-12). These four factors are thereby evaluated by states, and in the event of a state essentially ‘perceiving’ a

¹² Waltz posits that the more power a state has, the more that state appears as a threat to the others (1979: 112), implying the importance of threat, but still putting the primary focus on power.

¹³ There are two additional points of importance to note with these four factors: 1) it is not necessary that each of the four factors are measured as being the same weight or applicability for something to constitute a threat, and; 2) as intentions and perceptions are subjective and mutable states may find it safer to balance against potential threats, than hope for continued benevolence (Walt, 1985, p. 8-15).

threat, a balancing (or bandwagoning¹⁴) response is thereby produced; with the assumption that the more threatening a state appears to be, the more a balancing reaction is likely (Walt, 1985, p. 13). While the first three factors are reflective of realist measurements of power considered by other theorists (Gulick, 1955; Harknett and Van Den Ber, 1997; Waltz, 2010), Walt's 'offensive intentions' is the primary focus of this thesis in measuring Australia's perception of threat. Thus, the next, most important question is: what can offensive intentions be considered to include?

Walt, and others exploring threat, point to a number of considerations states take into account when evaluating the 'offensive intentions' (i.e. threat) of another state. These generally fall into four primary categories – realist, ideological, economic, and environmental (Walt, 1985, Walt 1990, Brauch, 2010). Realist considerations fall into the realm of military or Westphalian concerns wherein another state is perceived as posing a threat to the territory or sovereignty¹⁵ of another state, and which can be both direct or indirect (Walt, 1985, p. 30-37). Direct instances of offensive intentions, and thereby threat, can be seen in the case of one state attacking, invading, or supporting destabilizing forces in another state directly¹⁶. Whereas indirect ones can be seen in a situation where a state is known to do similarly to other states, and is thus seen as being more aggressive, and thereby more threatening, in general¹⁷ (Walt, 1985, p. 37). Walt outlines that these may either be immediate, as seen with the example of Libya and Colonel Qaddafi or perceived having a high level of potential, as seen with his example of the 1907 memorandum on British Policy towards Germany by Eyre Crowe (1985, p. 12). In addition to these, more subjective or ideological considerations are a part of the evaluation of offensive intentions.

¹⁴ While balancing is seen when states ally against a greater power; an instance where states ally with a greater power is known as "bandwagoning", see Walt's "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power" for more on bandwagoning.

¹⁵ A number of studies that utilize balance of threat examine cases where armed conflict has or is taking place (see (for example): Barnett & Levy, 1991; Gause III, 2003).

¹⁶ This would be the case if (for example) China was perceived as readying itself to invade Australia

¹⁷ This could be considered to be the case in the context of China's aggressive actions in Hong Kong, the South China Sea, Tibet, and a number of other cases.

Ideological considerations include political, cultural or other such traits (Walt, 1985, p. 18) and states which, for example, fall opposite of another's ideological spectrum are more likely to be perceived as having offensive intentions. That is to say; states with dissimilar traits may fear each other more as they may find it easier to imagine being attacked by them (Walt, 1985, p. 20) and the existence of the other may inherently threaten their own autonomy or authority (Walt, 1985, p. 21). This dynamic has been portrayed in the past between, for example, America and communist states such as the Soviet Union. Finally, offensive considerations also take into account the importance of the subjective perceptions of individual actors, and overarching beliefs. This is to say that if a political figure believes that a state has offensive intentions – such as through ideological differences – they will view (and act as though) another state is a potential enemy and threat (Walt, 1985, p. 26). This dynamic was also highlighted by Waltz, wherein he opined that a country becomes what it is treated as (Waltz, 2010, p. 130), therefore, a country is a superpower, or by extension a threat, if it is treated like a superpower, or a threat¹⁸. Economic and environmental considerations on the other hand concern issues such as; poverty, hunger, deprivation, economic and market security, as well as water, energy, migration, environmental degradation and other issues triggered by a perception of changes to the international political order and the global environment (Brauch, 2010, p. 104).

For the purposes of this thesis, as it is focused on and uses data from Australia's political figures and their outward perspective, 'offensive intentions' is instead examined under the label of [Australia's] 'perception of threat' – which allows for a more concise understanding of what is being analysed¹⁹. As such, the Independent Variable of this thesis is [Australia's] 'perception of threat' – as it specifically relates to China in the context of the types of threat covered in this section (i.e. realist, ideological, economic and environmental). While the other aspects of threat proposed by Walt, (aggregate power; proximity; offensive capability), are important to an analysis of threat, the quantitative

¹⁸ China is an excellent example of this, Nixon spoke of China as both a superpower and an upcoming superpower in the 70s, which is a juxtaposition that can still be seen today in the speeches and texts of contemporary political leaders.

¹⁹ The alternative would be [China's] "offensive intentions" [from the perspective of Australian political figures].

analysis these factors would require does not fit within a qualitative study of Australia's perception of threat. Therefore, this thesis will instead look to instances where considerations of aggregate power, proximity, and offensive capability are included as related mentions or statements in the context of Australia's perception of China in the texts examined. These will then be presented as evidence of threat and outlined in the data analysis section of the paper to illustrate that China was a consistently present and potentially growing threat during the time in question for this study.

As outlined previously, there is a line of thought that balance of power is flawed as it 'ignores the other factors considered by political figures' (Walt, 1985, p. 8), yet for all of the added perspective provided by balance of threat, it is still focused on system-level threat pressures – meaning that balance of threat theory posits that if there is a perception of threat at the system-level (i.e. the international system is in imbalance), then states form and/or participate in alignments. Such an approach ignores domestic-level pressures – that is to say what is happening at the national level – that can impact alignments and their formation. To explore the impact of domestic-level factors on alignments by affecting policy makers' calculations of how to respond to a perceived imbalance of threat, this chapter now turns to approaches that consider domestic-level factors; such as neoclassical realism, which posits that such domestic pressures must be brought into focus alongside system-level pressures. The following section thereby introduces neoclassical realism and other literature to explore the additional explanatory power a consideration of domestic-level factors can provide into a study on Australia's alignment decisions in the context of the Quad.

2.5 Bringing domestic-level factors into realist accounts of balancing

This thesis now turns to an introduction of neoclassical realism and other literature to explore the importance of domestic-level factors and how such factors mediate system-level pressures on the alignment decisions carried out by states. Traditional alignment and alliance literature has been primarily concerned with system-level factors; meaning that the primary focus is on the balance, or imbalance, of power (Waltz) or threat (Walt) in the

international system. Neoclassical realism, however, while beginning with a traditionally realist approach to balance of power (Kitchen, 2010, p. 134; Brawley, 2010), (meaning that it presupposes the role system-level pressures play in alliance formation), further posits that domestic-level factors are an important element that must be included in consideration of a state's alignment decisions (Kitchen, 2010, p. 134; Tang, 2009, p. 799).

Gideon Rose was the first to propose 'neoclassical realism', and the idea that "system-level pressures must be translated through intervening variables [the domestic-level factors] at the unit level²⁰" (Kitchen, 2010, p. 117). While some scholars posit that such an approach sacrifices predictive power of a more general and scalable nature, (Kitchen, 2010, p. 118) the more case-specific, exacting nature of neoclassical realism provides an excellent resource for exploring and understanding a specific phenomenon (Kitchen, 2010). The approach highlights both the complexity of the world, and that events in international politics are more likely to mean that alignment or alliance decisions reflect an interaction of multifaceted factors and influences. Such as domestic politics, state power and processes, the perceptions of Heads of State and Government, and the impact of ideas (Kitchen, 2010, p. 118; Tang, 2009, p. 802). Neoclassical realism, thus, provides more descriptive accuracy as it allows for a more thorough analysis of human perspectives via political leaders, which had been left out of the more traditional realist views on alignment formation (Kitchen, 2010). To put it more plainly, neoclassical realism posits that system-level explanations for alignments, such as an imbalance of power or threat, cannot be considered in isolation, as these factors (i.e. power and threat) are mediated by *innenpolitik* (Kitchen, 2010, p. 119) or domestic-level factors, which are themselves the result of human perspective. Thus, neoclassical realism postulates that the mediation of these domestic-level variables "have the potential to explain 'why some states act contrary to the structural imperatives of the international system'" (Kitchen, 2009, p. 132) and that it "is able to account for grand strategic change in an unchanging systemic environment by observing shifts at the unit that drive strategic adjustment" (Kitchen, 2009, p. 139). This brings forth the question, however, of what domestic-level factors to consider?

²⁰ Unit level being another domestic level consideration (Kitchen, 2010)

As noted by neoclassical realist works, there are a “plethora of intervening variables” that have been proposed and addressed by this approach (Kitchen 2009, p. 120; Tang, 2009). What is common among these, however, is that many of the intervening variables considered are reflective of both subjective ideas (or beliefs) and practical realities²¹ (Beqa, 2019; Kitchen, 2009; Mclean 2016; Schweller 2004). Domestic level variables have also been considered by those outside of the neoclassical realism camp, such as by Barnett and Levy, whom have been heavily featured in neoclassical realist works. Thereby, this thesis also turns to the variables²² presented in the 1991 work of Barnett and Levy to provide a starting post and more exacting structure to the “plethora” of intervening variables posited by neoclassical realist scholars, and thus examines ‘the condition of the domestic economy’ and ‘electoral concerns’ as the intervening variable of this thesis, termed in combination as “domestic-level costs” for the purpose of this thesis, although they are explained separately in more detail in the following sections. These have been deemed together “domestic-level costs” as they impact the considerations political actors take into account when calculating the cost-benefit of whether or not to align. These may, for example, be autonomy costs, economic costs, or even political costs, for example, in costing a government its own stability or popularity. In this way, it can be said that if domestic-level costs are higher than the perception a state has of a threat, it may affect a state’s alignment decisions.

Barnett and Levy were selected as the starting point for this study because it is the belief of this scholar, that their prevalence in neoclassical realist literature illustrates the strength of the variables they posit as a starting point, while also being reflective²³ of a general consensus of the more fundamental aspects that the literature returns to time and again when examining which domestic factors are of import. Additionally, while many other

²¹ This is very poetically put by Kitchen in his article ‘Systemic pressures and domestic ideas’: “the ‘world images’ that have been created by ideas have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest.” (2009, p. 129)

²² These include perceived external threat ; the condition of the domestic economy; the perceived threat to domestic stability; and the extent of external alignment (1991, p. 394)

²³ This can be especially seen in work by Randall Schweller wherein the former posits that those at the domestic level (i.e. political figures) consider issues such as ‘changes in relative power’ (i.e. the condition of the domestic economy) and ‘regime vulnerability and social cohesion’ (i.e. Perceived threat (governmental and) domestic stability) in a “causal chain” of how policy changes towards alignments occur (2004, p. 169). Perceived threat (governmental and) domestic stability

factors might also be important, the economy and electoral concerns of a government affect alignment decisions because they directly affect the calculations of decisions makers in the form of domestic-level costs of whether or not to align in the face of a perceived threat. Thus, this study utilizes a neoclassical realist approach, and examines ‘the condition of [Australia’s] domestic economy’ and ‘perception of electoral concerns’, to analyse the events from 2007 to 2017 in the context of the Quad and to gain further understanding into the dependant variable of this paper: ‘Australia’s alignment decisions’. The following sections will explain each of these domestic-level factors as well as how they affect a governments choices in alignment decisions in the face of threat.

2.5.1 The condition of Australia’s domestic economy

The condition of a state’s domestic economy has been highlighted, directly and indirectly, as an important factor in the alignment decisions taken by states in response to a perceived threat. In other words, the condition of a state’s domestic economy affects a state’s calculations on its alignment decisions in response to a perceived system-level threat. As Schweller posits, changes in relative power (as changes in the condition of the domestic economy – positive or negative²⁴ – may bring) can be considered an important aspect in what he calls the “causal chain” (2004, p. 169) of decision making in the context of alignments. Essentially, a state’s domestic economic situation can amplify or restrict a state’s inclination to participate in an alignment response, and whether they are able to commit to an alignment. In looking to the literature, there are a number of ways in which the condition of the domestic economy can have such an impact.

²⁴ “positive” is meant to mean economic conditions or changes that are seen when an economy is expanding – economic growth (i.e. GDP growth and growth potential, rising or high employment, consumer and investor confidence, and favorable business environments); whereas “negative” is meant to mean economic contraction wherein the opposite tendencies can be seen (i.e. a recession, financial crisis, or falling GDP, poor economic forecasts, rising or high unemployment, a depression in consumer and investor confidence, and higher than average business bankruptcies or falling entrepreneurialism, which signal unfavorable business environments).

It has been suggested that a negative economic condition discourages participation in alignment arrangements in a number of ways. Firstly, a poor economic situation is likely to restrict or discourage a state's alignment decisions (Barnett and Levy 1991; Bran, 1994; Stein, 1993). This is evident in alignments that require additional resource costs (such as requirements for feeding and housing all the additional personnel or of keeping new territories), and those that further negatively impact the long-term strength of a state's economy or the state's ability to satisfy important domestic welfare targets, which would be less alluring to a state. Mature Great Powers for example, (i.e. 1980s America according to Arthur Stein) are likely to face negative economic constraints in their alignment decisions, by overextending their commitments to the alignment – both militarily and fiscally – to the point wherein this interferes with a state's ability to act in a way that balancing theorists would expect to see (Stein, 1993, p. 99-100). Additionally, a negative economic condition may itself trigger a change in the ranking of serious threats or the identification of a new threat; as well as the changing of a state's "significant auxiliary goals" (Kitchen, 2010, p. 138-139) and the means (and methods) that are open for a state to achieve these or any other goals. Conversely, a positive economic condition would provide a state with the ability to accept alignments that require more military or fiscal commitments, but could also allow a state to forgo an alignment arrangement if state leaders believe that the positive economic situation allows the state to be self-reliant instead of requiring the alignment to provide the security the state requires (i.e. "if leaders believe that economic assets can be converted into military strength quickly" [Brawley, 2010, p. 5]).

For the purposes of this study, the statements of the figures included in the study (i.e. the Australian public and political and economic / financial sector figures), are taken to indicate the actual condition of the domestic economy. One would expect that if there is evidence that high-level governmental actors (i.e. Prime Ministers, Ministers, the Treasurer, the Head of the Reserve Bank of Australia [a government-banking institution]) perceive the condition of the domestic economy to be positive (i.e. growing) or negative (i.e. contracting, recessions), then they will act as such. This thesis will thereby examine the

economic situation experienced by Australia during the periods under question and look for evidence of the condition of the domestic economy influencing Australia's alignment decisions regarding the Quad. If the condition of the domestic economy affects Australia's alignment decisions, one would expect to see a variation over time, wherein faced with an external threat a negative perception of the domestic economic condition makes alignment less likely, while a positive condition would make alignment more likely.

2.5.2 Perception of electoral concerns

Besides the condition of the domestic economy, and therefore the availability or unavailability of resources, another condition that effects a governments calculations in the context of alignment action decisions in the face of external threat is the perception of electoral concerns. It is important first, however, to understand the context that this is understood within. Literature on the influence of domestic-level factors on system-level pressures to align often features an examination of 'domestic stability' (Barnett & Levy, 1991; Morrow, 1991; Nathan, 2006). Upon closer inspection, however, it is clear that there is a precedent wherein 'domestic stability' is often equated with governmental stability and what political actors perceive as a threat to staying in power²⁵ – or what can also be interpreted as 'electoral concerns' (Barnett & Levy, 1991; Levy, 1988, Morrow, 1991; Nathan, 2006). Further to this, it is clear that the regime of a state – i.e. non-democracy vs democracy – must be taken into consideration, given the variation in what differing regimes consider or perceive to be concerning or threatening. A democratic state, for example, which has benefitted from the "solidification of the state system" (Barnett & Levy, 1991, p. 373) would have differing perceptions of, and perceived, threats to their electoral concerns,

²⁵ This parallel is particularly emphasized by Barnett and Levy in which they posit that domestic political constraints (such as threats to government rule) may influence political elites as such that they may look to external alignments to provide for their own political security (1991, p. 370). Further, they later directly equate 'domestic stability' with 'the perceived threats to the government's political stability' (1991, p. 379) in their exploration of Egypt's alignment decisions between 1962-1973.

than non-democratic states²⁶ (Levy, 1988). Thus, as this thesis examines Australia, a modern, democratic state, this study focuses on the perspectives of Australia's democratic government within the context of its 'electoral concerns'.

What can be considered an 'electoral concern' varies by the agency prescribed to political figures, as well as a number of other factors. Streeck and Thelen, (2005), March and Olsen (1989), and Schweller (2004) are among those whom point out the agency held by political figures is of the utmost importance to a state's alignment decisions. While, Harknett & VanDenBer, are perhaps the most emphatic in their postulation that significant internal opposition to a state's leader (such as low opinion polls, low popularity, attempted ousting by their own party, etc.,) may represent the predominate factor motivating alignment behaviour (1997, p. 120)²⁷ and, thus, the power of the media, press corps and elections themselves on political actors also cannot be understated (Beckmann & Godfrey 2007; Chan et al., 2020; and Streeck & Thelen, 2005). Further to this is the thought that the way in which the public views political leaders or "shifts in personnel, institutional power, or the popularity of particular ideas may precipitate changes" (Kitchen, 2009, p. 139) and that any such shifts may originate from, "the bottom up", such as through bureaucratic leverage or election results (Kitchen, 2009, p. 139), or from "the top down, in the form of the executive power of patronage and final decision." (Kitchen, 2009, p. 139).

In a democracy, there is a connection between winning elections and staying in power. This means that electoral cycles also play an important role, as they influence²⁸ when incumbents must be (most) concerned with staying in power. Thus, the electoral cycle itself can be said to impact the decisions made by political figures. This is reflected in literature that theorises that governments, or political figures, are more likely to enact opportunistic

²⁶ In his article 'Domestic Politics and War' Jack Levy posits that not being "constrained by a system of checks and balances or electoral accountability" leads non-democratic governments to engage in more wars "for the most trivial reasons", implying non-democratic states have a much wider perception of what constitutes a threat (Levy, 1988, p. 658).

²⁷ Both Barnett and Levy, as well as Harknett and VanDenBer study Third World and/or developing countries in their analyses of alliance motivations.

²⁸ Influences but not dictates in the case of states like Australia where unexpected elections are not uncommon.

policy changes (and thus also less likely to enact less opportunistic ones) depending on the stage of the electoral cycle they are experiencing (Geys, 2007). It has been theorized that elected officials act with “opportunistic rather than ideological motivations” (Geys, 2007, p. 238) ascribed to their primary concern with staying in power. Thus, it has been posited that the timing of the electoral cycle can affect political behaviour, decisions and policy making (Geys, 2007; Paldam, 1981). Looking to election cycles, in the context of expected elections²⁹, there are a number of periods of time that have been examined in terms of being influential points. These include the year prior to and immediately following an election, (Geys, 2007; Kneebone & McKenzie 2001) as well as more specific “honeymoon periods” that range from the first 100 days to first year in office (Beckmann & Godfrey, 2007; Chan, et al., 2020; Roper & Andrews), wherein a political leader is more likely to be able to enact policy changes, and build the profile of their new government – the implication being of also highlighting the difference between the new government and the old, being (Brommesson & Ekengren, 2013, p. 11; Chan, et al. 2020, p. 1). This means that, for example, at the beginning of an electoral cycle, heads of state or government are likely less constrained in their decision making, and may feel more able to make unpopular decisions – such as (for example) entering an unpopular or exiting a popular alignment. While at a later stage in the electoral cycle, especially immediately before an election, they are more constrained and less easily able to make unpopular decisions. Likewise, if alignment is popular, then it can be considered ‘opportunistic’ as it would bring votes, whereas if it were unpopular it is opportunistic not to.

This thesis thereby examines the alignment decisions taken by political leaders in Australia, by looking for evidence of electoral concerns (i.e. staying in power or opportunistic decisions) and the timing of actions relating to the Quad. It is expected that a high level of electoral concerns, (i.e. unpopularity of actors or decisions, unexpected elections, changes in the popularity of policy / foreign policy stances) mediate the pressures of a perception of

²⁹ Geys, (2007) also points out the additional issue of government (in)stability over time (p. 242), such as when political parties split, merge, disappear, or change, although does not touch upon the ousting of political figures. Geys found that this variable was “extremely difficult” to measure, and focused only on expected elections. This is an interesting point of note, however, in systems like Australia’s where elections are often called unexpectedly and political leaders are unexpectedly ousted equally often.

threat by acting as an intervening variable (along with the economic condition as part of domestic-level costs), making alignment (i.e. balancing) less likely. While, conversely, evidence of low-level of electoral concerns in the face of threat would indicate that alignment is more likely.

2.6 Theoretical conclusions

In order to explain Australia's pattern of alignment decisions within the context of the Quad, this thesis combines balance of threat theory with an examination of the influence of domestic-level factors on states' decisions to balance against threat in the form of alignment. Thus, rather than alignment decisions being solely determined by system-level factors, such as an imbalance of threat or an imbalance of power (as would be argued by Walt and Waltz), this study holds that domestic-level costs significantly shape a government's calculations on whether to align in the face of an external threat.

Thereby, this thesis posits that a state's alignment decisions³⁰ (the dependent variable) in the face of a perception of threat (the independent variable) are influenced by 'domestic-level costs'³¹ (the intervening variable). While the introduction of domestic-level factors to balance of threat theory leads away from a focus of neo-realist alliance theories on system-level factors such as balance of power (Waltz) and balance of threat (Walt) alone, this study remains broadly within the realist tradition by combining the influence of system-level

³⁰ External alignment has acted as both a domestic and system-level variable in previous alignment literature (Barnett & Levy, 1991; Adler & Barnett, 1998; Nathan, 2006), with some academics considering whether the domestic policies of each individual state align along the same issues, or whether the states are members in larger security communities or alliances – such as NATO (Adler & Barnett, 1998). However, academics such as Nathan highlight that the emergence of an alignment is already indicative that the conditions that motivate states to adopt similar orientations, and engage in cooperation and policy coordination are already in play (Nathan 2006, p. 276), thus, the existence of and/or membership in alignments is more telling than coordinating policies between states. This study is in agreement with Nathan's approach to external alignment, as it is whether Australia is "positive" (i.e. in) or "negative" (i.e. out) of the Quad that is of primary importance, rather than how it's policy aligns with the other members at any given time, and thereby is presented as a dichotomous variable in this thesis.

³¹ As noted in section 2.5, domestic-level costs is an aggregate variable composed of both the 'condition of the domestic economy' and 'perception of electoral concerns'.

pressures and domestic conditions in a way highlighted by neoclassical realism. Therefore, the hypothesis of this paper is that is that, if domestic-level costs are high, a high perception of threat does not lead to external alignment decisions, whereas if domestic-level costs are low, a high perception of threat leads to external alignment. Meaning that if domestic-level costs are high, there is a disruption of balancing behaviour, and it is this which led to Australia's negative alignment decisions, regardless of high perception of threat in 2008. The following chapter presents the methodology of this thesis and includes an explanation of the case selection, operationalization, as well as the data collection and analysis processes used over the course of this study.

3. Methodology

The following chapter aims to provide clarification on the case selection, operationalization, and data collection and analysis of this thesis. The first part will provide an overview of the specifics of the case selection and operationalization, and the latter portion will offer insight into the data collection and method of analysis.

3.1 Case selection

The study consists of a single case study with three within-case observations; Australia's alignment decisions at three separate points in time: during the first formation, the cessation, and the reformation of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, comprised of Australia, Japan, India, and the United States of America. A case study is a particularly good method for testing theories from the literature, and to understand the especially complex phenomena that can exist within IR (Bennett & Elman, 2007, p. 171-172).

The case of Australia in the context of the Quad, may be seen as a deviant case. Qualities of a deviant case can be seen in cases wherein outcomes are either different than other similar cases, or do not conform to the expectations or predictions that the theory in question would lead one to expect (Bennet & Elman, 2007, p. 176-177). Both aspects of deviant cases can be seen in this instance. The variation of Australia's alignment decisions are not reflected in the other states, while Australia decided to align with the Quad and took part in the first formation of the cooperation during 2007, it reversed that decision 2008 by departing from the Quad, and then reverted to its original decision to align again in 2017 – which is currently still ongoing. Facing similar system-level pressures as other member of the Quad during these periods, but differing from them in terms of response (i.e. the continuity of alignment) the case of Australia lends itself to an examination of the impact of domestic-level variables on system-level pressures on alignment decisions. This study posits that the presence of high-level of domestic costs served as an intervening variable and mitigated the impact of the system-level pressures, (i.e. a high perception of threat) that are expected by

neorealist theory (focusing exclusively on system-level factors) to result in balancing behaviour. Thereby, this study examines Australia’s variation in alignment decisions in the face of threat, and aims to explain it through the context of the impact of domestic factors on alignment formation. This, in turn, will allow an assessment of the relative explanatory power of system-level pressures (i.e. balance of power and balance of threat) and domestic-level costs (i.e. domestic stability and economic conditions) in the alignment decisions of states. This section has provided an overview of the reasoning behind the case selection of this thesis, and the following section covers the indicators, and values used for the operationalization of this study.

3.2 Operationalization

This section provides more detail on the variables examined within this thesis, as well as the indicators and values used to measure these. Information on the data sources follows in the next section. In this thesis, the dependent variable (DV) is that of Australia’s alignment decisions, while the independent variable (IV) is that of [Australia’s] perception of threat. It is expected that while the perceived threat, presented by China, continued to be present and high, the presence of high domestic-level costs caused a disruption in what would have otherwise led to a balancing reaction (i.e. alignment) (See Figure 1. Table 1). In other words; if domestic-level costs are high, then Australia’s alignment decisions will be negative, regardless of a high perception of threat.

	2007	2008	2017-present
Perception of threat (regarding China) (IV)	High	High	High
Domestic-level costs (iV)	Low	High	Low
Alignment decisions (DV)	Positive (Member of the Quad)	Negative (Not a member)	Positive (Member of the Quad)

Figure 1. Table 1.

This thesis, therefore, posits that domestic-level costs (the iV) can be used to explain why a state's behaviour (the DV), even in the presence of threat (the IV) can differ from the outcome expectations of balance of threat theory (see figure 2).

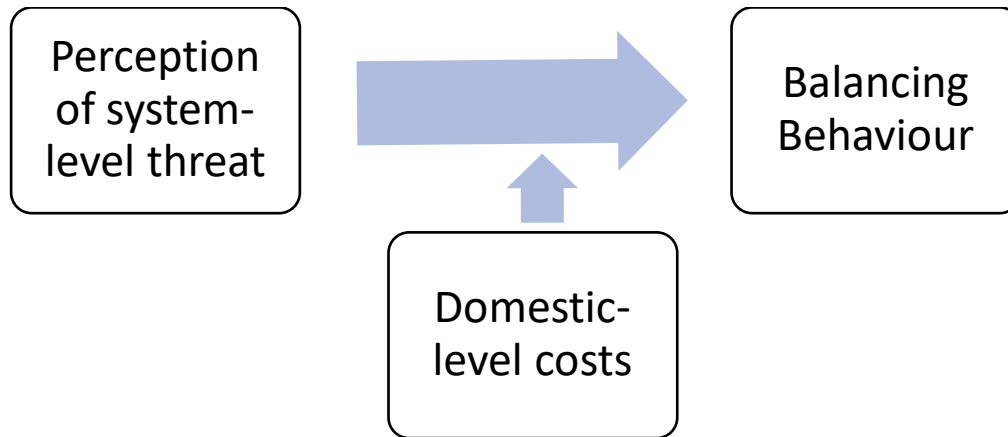


Figure 2: The hypothesized intervening nature of domestic-level costs on typical balancing expectations

For the measurement of [Australia's] perception of threat, this study looks for evidence of indicators such as the positive or negative mentions of China in the context realist, ideological, economic and environmental threats, as well as the other three factors of evaluating potential threat as outlined by Walt³². These indicators include the direct and implicit use of terms and phrases, ranging from 'threat' to 'friends', in policy documents and speeches concerning China, in the context of both traditional and non-traditional types of threat (i.e. military, economic trade, climate change, territorial expansion, human rights abuse(s), and in the context of Taiwan, the Dalai Lama, Hong Kong, territorial waters or the South China Sea) to measure Australia's threat perception as representative among high-level Australian political figures, analysts and the public or general population. Threat perception is found to be high when there is a presence or repeated presence of words or

³² These are based on Walt's four factors that state take into account when evaluating potential threat: 1) aggregate power; 2) proximity; 3) offensive capability ; and 4) offensive intentions.

phrases that describe China as a direct or potential, challenge, risk or threat to Australia, Australia's interests, the region, or stability in the region concerning Australia. As well as words or phrases that allude (directly or indirectly) to a difficult, distrusting, complex, or challenging relationship between Australia and China, or evidence of concern with being dominated or overpowered or of China contributing to tensions in the regions concerning Australia or in Australia's relationship with Quad allies. Symbolic allusions that associate China, or the aggregate power of China, with beings or animals perceived as aggressive or overwhelming, such as 'dragons'; 'tigers' or 'giants', as well as evidence of Chinese influence in an unwanted, illegal, nefarious or ethically dubious way. Threat perception is found to be low when the above descriptors or terms are not present and China is instead described as a trusted partner, friend, or ally of Australia.

The measurement of domestic-level costs is broken down into an examination of the condition of the domestic economy and electoral concerns. Turning first to the indicators of the condition of [Australia's] domestic economy, this study takes statements of high-level political actors to be indicative and representative of the actual quantitative situation, given that one can reasonably expect that governmental leaders whom offer their perceptions of the economy in positive or negative terms in statements or documents and will similarly act in line with their perception. Thus, financial data as well as expert opinions on the condition of the economy will be presented to measure the positive or negative condition of the economy throughout the time periods included, through the use of indicators that are either negative statements or terms, such as uncertainty, recession, downturn, turmoil, decline, crisis, contraction, hard, bad, difficult or troubling times; and worsening unemployment, consumer confidence or spending. As well as positive statements or terms such as GDP or employment growth, 'booms' that are economic, financial or sector specific, prosperity, and terms that are suggestive of the best (or worst) economic conditions in Australia's history – such as 'strongest', 'weakest' or 'historic'.

Electoral concerns looks to indicators such as popular or unpopular policy changes, political posturing, or pandering to specific topics that are controversial, polarizing, in-demand or unwanted, as well as polling of the popularity / unpopularity of an actor or their

actions and decisions. As well as the personal preferences of political leaders themselves influencing policy stances or decisions. Also examined is the timing of the electoral cycle, and the indicators will be further examined for the period of the electoral cycle they fall into. The periods of the electoral cycle are ‘early’ (100 days before and after an election); mid (101 days from, until 200 days before an election); and late (201-101 days before an election). Actions or decisions taken within these time periods will then be examined in the contexts of opportunism or differentiation, such as in having a desirable or controversial nature, being seen as popular or unpopular with the populace, or whether prior governments avoided them.

Domestic-level costs are high when there is evidence of negative indicators of both the condition of the domestic economy and electoral concerns with the absence of positive indicators. It is low when there is evidence of positive indicators of both the condition of the domestic economy and the electoral concerns with the absence of negative indicators, and it is medium when there is evidence of positive indicators and negative indicators in either the condition of the domestic economy or the Electoral Concerns; but not both at the same time.

Australia’s alignment decisions are a dichotomous variable, as this thesis looks to find an explanation for the rationale behind Australia’s decisions to align or not align with (i.e. take part in) the Quad. Therefore, Australia’s alignment decisions are ‘positive’ if there are indicators of Australia’s participation in the Quad in the context of being a member, or of Australia being a founding member or part of the initiative, being “in”, or of the progressing, continuing, or deepening of the Quad with Australia’s participation. Indicators also include instances where Quad members are reported to be, or perceived as working together or taking part in events and formal or informal meetings or exercises, as well as any cooperation between the four members aligned with furthering the described goals of the Quad, or of deepening the cooperation between all four members. Australia’s alignment decisions are ‘negative’ if there is an absence of the above indicators of Australia’s participation, as well as evidence of Australia’s departure, leaving, having left, quitting or

having quit the Quad. Now having gone over the indicators considered for this study, the next paragraph looks to the methods used for analysis.

The methods used to analyse this phenomenon of interest are those of document analysis and qualitative content analysis. Document analysis is the review or evaluation of a wide variety of document forms, which is well suited to qualitative case studies as it allows research to produce rich and detailed descriptions and interpretations of a case or phenomena. Further, document analysis is typically paired with a secondary method, and is excellently matched with qualitative content analysis, and allows researchers to provide better and more reliable data (Bowen, 2009, p. 28). Such as through triangulation, contextualisation, broader insights, or as a part of tracking change and development (Bowen, 2009, p. 29-32;). Document analysis, thereby allows for a better understanding of the themes and patterns present and identifying whether (for example) perception of threat evolves over time, and how or if it is reflected in the sentiments of all levels of government figures.

Qualitative content analysis utilized in addition to document analysis. Qualitative content analysis allows for the examination of both latent and manifest meaning (Bengtsson, 2016), and the systematic analysis of content for “e.g. who says what, to whom, why, to what extent and with what effect” (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 115). This is especially important in this study, which relies upon the authors interpretation of the perception present in both the subjective and objective data analysed. Put another way, Qualitative Content Analysis is a good fit for exploring both the tangible concrete data that comes along with financial and economic reporting and any outright statements that would indicate perception and external alignment. Additionally, qualitative content analysis allows for the exploration of latent meaning in the context of what is unsaid, and what was intended to be said, considering the context and the circumstances, which is fitting for the more subjective aspects of the study (Klotz et al., 2008). This is especially important in the context of this study, wherein the impact of changing circumstances and contexts (i.e. yearly changes in domestic-level costs) are specifically thought to be a deciding factor in Australia’s alignment decisions. Having now explored the indicators, measurements and methods of analysis employed for the

purpose of this thesis, the following section details the data collection and sources of this study, as well as the coding method utilized.

3.3 Data Collection

This first half of this section introduces the sampling method and data sources, while the second half details the coding, coding platform, and coding method of this study. This thesis utilizes the principle of the purposeful sampling of sources in relation to gathering and selecting the documents for the measurement of indicators of each variable in 2007, 2008, and 2017. Purposeful sampling involves the identification and selection of groups or individuals that can be considered to be experts or experienced with the specific phenomenon in question (Creswell & Clark; 2017, p. 235). The documents examined by this thesis reflect, produce or give evidence to the views and statements of the public as well as high-level actors from the Australian government and other sectors whose roles are specifically focused on the variables under examination. This includes (current and former) Prime Ministers, Foreign Affairs Ministers, Defence Ministers, figures from the Australian Treasury, and high-level actors from the Reserve Bank of Australia, which (while not being a wholly government institution) exists to provide financial, banking, and economic services to the Australian Government, and also has members of the Australian Treasury on its board. Other supplementary data sources included are policy analysts, journalists, and economists from trusted and reputable news sources, including the Australian sources such as Australian Broadcasting Corporation, The Age, the Sydney Herald, the Diplomat, the Monthly and the Financial Review, as well as international ones such as the BBC, the New York Times, the Japan Times, and the Economist. Thus, the purposeful sampling method is ideal because it allows for system-level comparison and aims for diversity (Barbour, 2008) and allows for the possibility for evidence of changes to develop over time. Allowing, for example, the exploration of sources wherein there is consistency in terms of the authority under which they were given (i.e. documents produced by different actors in the same positions over different periods i.e. Prime Minister Howard in 2007, Rudd in 2008, and

Turnbull in 2017) as well as the subject or occasion. Thus, the data analyzed for the purposes of this study includes texts and documents such as speech transcripts, press releases, debate transcripts, interview transcripts, as well as policy documents and policy papers, such as defence white papers and defence reports. The timeframe of the materials examined for each period (i.e. 2007, 2008 and 2017) is that of year in question as well as the one prior and following, with the exception of retrospectives specifically written about Quad, the global financial crisis, or electoral concerns / Australian political leader's perceptions of China during the periods under examination. This study also includes economic reports; as well as popular press, media pieces, opinion pieces, and transcripts of events covered by Australian media, selected for their timeliness or relevance. Meaning that they were selected due to being written by high-level political leaders (i.e. former prime ministers), or directly concern the Quad or the other subjects included previously. These data and sources were systematically gathered through a comprehensive search of keywords (i.e. the Quad, China, threat, challenge, global financial crisis, etc.), as well as by following the documents referenced in the examined data. Now that the data sources examined have been described, the next paragraph covers the coding process that was used for analysis.

A lean, “splitter” method of coding was used via the Dovetail coding platform. The coding process was developed gradually, first finding a selection of primary data, forming the preliminary categories based on said data, and then progressing to new data and the formulation of new codes, as per the premise of the grounded theory research method. Thus, the data was collected and explored through an initial open coding with tentative categorical links (Willig, 2013, p. 72), and thereby, the first step was of an initial categorisation of four broad terms that specifically related to the phenomena under question: the Quad, China, the economy, and government. Following this, while scouring the data, several commonly occurring references and themes – such as threats, regional stability, economic growth and the global financial crisis, and others, became apparent. These were then considered for their frames of reference: positive, negative or ambiguous. Meaning, for example, China in the context of the theme of ‘threat’ could be observed in

positive references, such as cooperative or friendly terms and phrases³³; or negative references, such as text that either alluded to, or outright belayed, fear, anxiety or challenges as well as directly deeming something a traditional or non-traditional threat³⁴. Ambiguous references were those that were neither positive or negative, but could be construed as either, and were thus important because they represented a preoccupation with the topic (i.e. China or the Quad) under examination³⁵.

³³ Such as: “[w]e will continue to work with China to encourage it to take a responsible role” (Downer, 2017).

³⁴ Such as: “The rapid rise of a new power, be it modern China or ancient Athens, creates anxiety” (Turnbull, 2017); “There has been foreign interference in Australian politics’ [...] Chinese influence on [Australian] domestic politics” (Gribbin, 2017).

³⁵ Such as: “China has gained the most from peace and harmony in our region and consequently it has the most to lose if it is threatened” (Turnbull, 2017).

4. Perception of threat, domestic-level costs, and Australia's alignment decisions regarding the Quad: 2007, 2008, 2017.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter brings forth the empirical data explored to analyse the factors which are thought to have determined Australia's alignment decisions with regard to the Quad, specifically focusing on the years of: 2007, 2008, and 2017. The focus of the analysis is on how domestic-level costs – the perception of condition of the domestic economy and electoral concerns – have affected the Australian government's decisions in terms of whether to align (in the form of the Quad) in response to the presence of China as a threat.

For this purpose, this chapter explores Australia's decisions at all three moments of observation. Beginning in 2007, this section presents the empirical data on (Australia's) perception of threat, Australia's alignment decisions, then the perception of the condition of the domestic economy and electoral concerns, before going on to do the same for the periods of 2008 and 2017.

4.2. The first iteration of Australia's alignment with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue: 2007

Australia's perception of threat - 2007

This section presents the level of Australia's perception of threat towards China in 2007. In this time period Australia's perception of threat in the context of China is clearly present. Growing concern due to China's rise in the context of changing regional and global power dynamics provide evidence that there is a perception of threat present among Australian political leaders that, while not alarmist, suggests a level of immediacy in how Australia

must respond to threat from China. This can be seen in the presence of indicators of high-level of threat perception that ascribe China as being dominating, critical, and contributing to the threat of regional instability, as well as military and climate change threats.

Australia's Minister for Defence writes in the 2007 Australian National Security Defence Update: "the strategic landscape is shifting [in the Asia-Pacific][...] At the same time, we are contending with instability in our immediate region" (Australia, p. 7, 2007), and later details that:

China's emergence as a major market and driver of the economic activity [...] has benefited the expansion of economic growth [...] But the pace and scope of its military modernisation, particularly the development of new and disruptive capabilities such as the anti-satellite (ASAT) missile (tested in January 2007) could create misunderstandings and instability in the region. (Australia, p. 19, 2007).

Providing evidence of a concern with China's aggregate power as well as proximal factors for Australia in terms of its surrounding region. Additionally, a retrospective specifically on the subject of the Quad, by Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd³⁶, refers to the 2007 formation of the Quad as "a classic geostrategic tool of 'offshore balancing'³⁷ against Beijing [...] implying China back in 2007 had already become a threat to the order" (Rudd, 2019). At another level of government, Alexander Downer, a Minister for Foreign affairs describes the relationship between the Australia and China as conflicting with a diplomatic descriptor and frames China as a potentially dominating power:

We have a good *modus vivendi*³⁸ with China. We have very different political systems and historical traditions, but we need to work with them. Having said that,

³⁶ Kevin Rudd was the Prime Minister of Australia from the latter half of 2007 to 2010 and again in 2013.

³⁷ Offshore balancing has been called a grand strategy, wherein a great power utilizes regional powers to check the rise of potentially-hostile powers. It has been typically associated with the United States of America. (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2016; Switzer, 2016)

³⁸ The term "modus vivendi" (emphasis in original) (Downer, 2007), which itself is Latin for an arrangement that allows conflicting parties to coexist.

we don't want to be dominated by any one power. (emphasis in original) (Downer, 2007).

This sentiment of a conflicting, or difficult relationship in the context of contrasting ideological differences is also seen repeated in the words of Prime Minister Howard. While he does not use the same terminology, he makes it clear that while he has focused on building a close relationship between Australia and China, any relationship that exists between the two is, and will always be, a wary (i.e. distrustful) one:

In relation to China, Australia, as you know, has striven over the last decade to build a very close relationship with China. But we've always done it against a background of being realistic about the nature of political society in that country. We have no illusions that China remains an authoritarian country. (Cheney & Howard, 2007)

Likewise, there is evidence of a wider concern with domination at other levels of government as well. A report on a 2007 Parliamentary Questionnaire purposed towards gaining a deeper understanding of Australia-China relations highlighted the thoughts of a number of Australian MPs. Included in the report of survey responses was one which opined that “the growing power of China will change the geo-political power relationships in this region and Australia may find China demanding that Australia follow their policy objectives in the future” (Parliament of Australia, 2009, p. 120). Suggesting that concern with a dominating China is not restricted to those at the highest-levels of government.

This continued presence of a China-centric threat can also be observed in the context of China's impact on Australia's economic condition and climate change. This can be fairly widely observed in the 2007 documents and texts³⁹ regarding China by Prime Minister John Howard⁴⁰. In some cases at the same time, wherein it is posited that not holding China

³⁹ For example, such as that industrial investment would leave Australia for China if China was not held to the same standards regarding avoiding climate change as Australia (see: Howard, 2007e; Howard, 2007f; and Howard, 2007g).

⁴⁰ It has been noted by those who have researched Australia-China relations that Prime Minister John Howard, and indeed many Australian governments that “the question how to strategically depict China and its threat potential without arousing Chinese hostility or suspicion has been a taxing issue [...] but, at the

to the same climate standards as Australia would both ruin the environment, and also encourage companies to depart Australia for China for the laxer standards (Howard, 2007e) (implying that laxer standards equal economic implications). Indeed, Mr. Rudd also notes in other documents that “the rise of China” has a huge impact (“these global factors impact hugely” (Howard & Rudd, 2007)) on Australia, both directly and indirectly. Such as through Australia’s economic condition and climate change:

And invest also to make sure that we are dealing with the critical challenges of climate change [...] You’ve got to have an international agreement that includes both the Americans and the Chinese and the Indians, because they are the major emitters. I mean, by the year 2030, what, something like two-thirds of the world’s emissions will be coming from the developing countries, or close to that [...] I agree with [Mr. Howard] on one point that he’s just made. And that is that China is critical. (Howard & Rudd, 2007)

The texts and documents from and regarding the 2007 time period paint a complex picture in the context of Australia’s threat perception of China. This finding from primary sources, is also in line with the observation of a number of academics that China has been one of the greatest potential modern threats to the defence and security of Australia (McDowall, 2009, p. 85). As included throughout the body of this section, there is evidence that there is a high perception of threat in the context of China in the presence of indicators that ascribe China as dominating, critical, and contributing to instability and climate change threats.

Therefore, it can be said that the evidence of a high-level of perception of threat would support an expectation of balancing behaviours by Australia according to balance of threat theory and a focus on system-level pressures; i.e. in a vacuum of a high-level of domestic costs.

Australia’s alignment decisions – 2007

same time, growing tension in Australia’s foreign policy between economic interest (China) and security interest (the United States) is observable” (McDowall, 2009, p. 1).

Having found evidence of a high-level of perception of threat in 2007, this section turns to mentions of the existence and activities of the Quad as an indicator of Australia's alignment decisions. The documents and texts examined include a number of direct statements, from a variety of levels of actors reflecting Australia's participation in the Quad in 2007, which are both retrospective and from written during the period itself.

In a retrospective, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, who served from the end of 2007 to 2010, directly overlapping the first tenure of the Quad examined its existence and development over each three periods – 2007, 2008 and 2017. Looking back to the Quad, what Rudd calls, “Quad Mark 1” (Rudd, 2019) the former PM notes that “one of the core questions in capitals back in 2007-2008 was where in fact did Abe intend to take the Quad over time?” (Rudd, 2019) and remarks that “I was directly involved in this important debate” (Rudd, 2019). As well as statements by those in the media: “[y]ou might remember this [quadrilateral] dialogue came out of the ASEAN Regional Forum session in May last year” (Doogue, 2008); “the four powers set up the initiative (informally named the Quad) in Manila last May” (Ali, 2007); and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence; “the quadrilateral security dialogue which was part of the Howard government's initiatives” (Bishop, 2017). These statements reflect that there is a shared consensus by those at a high-level of the Australian government that Australia was indeed a participant in the Quad during 2007.

Additional evidence of Australia's alignment decisions being positive within the 2007 period include numerous statements and reports of events occurring within the context of the Quad and of China's concern with the grouping. These are primarily found in the texts and documents of policy analysts and journalists:

A so-called quadrilateral dialogue among officials from the United States, Japan, Australia and India was held last year, much to China's concern [...] [a] tentative first meeting was held on the margins of a regional forum in Manila last May [...]

even this was too much for Beijing. It issued diplomatic protests demanding to know what the talks were about (Medcalf, 2008).⁴¹

Multiple sources also bring forth evidence for the Quad through China's preoccupation with the grouping, although there is no direct mention of China in materials on the Quad from 2007. There is, however, an emphasis on encouraging openness and transparency, human rights, as well as freedom, and the "imperative" need to deepen the relations of democratic nations within the region (Abe, 2007). These traits, the opposite of which (i.e. non-transparency, non-democratic, human rights abuses, restricted freedoms and openness) are often associated with China, do suggest an underlying anti-China sentiment in the purpose of the Quad (Jain, 2008). Additionally, analysts inside and outside of Australia noted that Australia's participation in the Quad denoted a signalling of a negative turn in Australian policy towards China, and that: "They [China] see this as a pattern in which the US and Japan have been trying to consolidate an alliance of democracies in Asia, which they feel is directed against them" (Nicholson, 2007). This sentiment of repeatedly evident in materials from 2007: "the newly launched Australia-India-Japan-U.S. 'Quadrilateral Initiative' has raised China's hackles, but its direction is still undecided owing to differing perceptions within the group over what its aims and objectives ought to be" (Chellaney, 2007). This was met by diplomatic protests and lobbying from China for the discontinuation of the Quad.

China was concerned enough by the Quad to take punitive retributive action, which was reported by multiple Australian sources: "Chinese authorities have issued formal diplomatic protests to Australia, the US, Japan and India" (Nicholson, 2007). "Reports of protests, sent by China to Australia, and Australia's attempts to reassure China of the purpose of the Quad (as opposed to Australia attempting to showcase a lack of participation) provide further confirmation of Australia's decision to align with the group. It was also reported that "diplomats lodged protests, demanding an explanation of the mysterious talks [...]"

⁴¹ In 2007, policy analysts and journalists also noted that Quad members brought their navies together for shared exercises (Medcalf, 2007; Ali, 2007); but that the events of the Quad were being kept quiet "so as not to upset the world's largest autocratic state, China." (Chellaney, 2007).

these demarches came with petty punishments, such as visa trouble for an Indian delegation due to visit China, and hints of worse to come” (Medcalf, 2008b). These multiple instances of confirmation provide evidence that Australia was a member and participant of the Quad. This means that in 2007 Australia decided to align with others in the format of the Quad. This decision can be seen as in line with the system-level pressures described in the previous section. Nevertheless, the following sections will provide insights into the domestic-level conditions prevailing at the time.

Condition of Australia’s domestic economy – 2007

Whereas the previous sections explored system-level pressure (perception of threat) as well as Australia’s alignment decisions, the following two sections turn to the domestic levels, and explore the level of domestic costs in 2007 – economic and political – that coincide with Australia’s decision to join the Quad. In an examination of the data from 2007, it is clear across all of the documents that the Australian domestic economy is positive, growing, or “booming” in 2007 (Edey, 2007; Howard, 2007a); and thus the condition of Australia’s domestic economy would not have contributed to a high-level of domestic costs.

The year 2007 is especially interesting given that a global recession (also called the global financial crisis or GFC) occurred in 2008⁴². Thus it would not be unreasonable to expect to see indicators of the future recession for Australia looming just ahead, yet this is not the case. A speech by Reserve Bank of Australia’s senior executive and Assistant Governor remarks on the “downturn in the US housing sector” but specifically notes that “at this stage, the overall slowing in the US economy has been very mild, and the housing downturn so far has not caused any major disruption to the rest of the economy” (Edey, 2007), further stating that “the short-term outlook for the world economy looks like it will be favourable to further growth in Australia [...] Longer term forces [...] [have] given

⁴² While the global financial crisis is generally seen as occurring in 2008, signs of a recession, such as contracting economies, falling employment, and trouble in the housing market began in some parts of the world as early as 2007 (Flannery, Simon & Mahendrarajah, 2013; Erkens, Hung & Matos, 2012).

significant boost to aggregate incomes and spending.” (Edey, 2007). Additionally, the Australian Treasury also recognised the “turbulence” that was occurring in the United States (the future global financial crisis), but predicted positive future growth if the situation “continues to be resolved in a relatively benign fashion, stronger outcomes are possible for the domestic economy.” (Australian Government The Treasury, 2007, p. 2) This means that there is evidence that the GFC had not reached Australia in 2007, and that state leaders within Australia were expecting continued growth in the following year.

Positive representations of the condition the Australian domestic economy are found delivered by a variety of sources and actors at all levels of the private and public spheres in 2007. In an election debate⁴³ – occurring in late October 2007 – the moderator reflected that “most people would agree the economy is in pretty good shape”; while the debate itself has over a dozen references to Australia’s “current prosperity” and “current [economic] boom” spread across each speaker (Howard & Rudd, 2007). Additionally, John Howard’s speech to Perth’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry could not portray the Australian economic situation in 2007 in a more positive manner:

Although we live in great economic times, we also have pressures, all economies have pressures. Fortunately the pressures we have the moment are the pressures of prosperity [...] The great economic conditions we have the present time are a combination of circumstances [...] This is the strongest economy Australia has had since World War II. (Howard, 2007a)

During 2007, Prime Minister Howard refers to the positive condition of Australia’s domestic economy repeatedly, in a variety of ways – such as with repeated references to a “booming economy” (Howard, 2007h); “booming job market” (Howard, 2007j); and “great economic prosperity” (Howard, 2007j). Texts by the Rudd government in the same period, are not as effulgent, but this is likely due to the fact that Prime Minister Rudd was not very prolific during the period. Indeed, where Prime Minister Kevin Rudd does talk about the

⁴³ The only one that occurred during the course of the 2007 Australian election.

economy in 2007, his portrayals invoke a feeling of ‘business as usual’ (see: Rudd, 2007a; Rudd, 2007b; Rudd, 2007c)– which provides additional indication that the GFC was not a key talking point in the period under examination.

Additional positive portrayals are also seen echoed across governmental sectors. In an address on the economic conditions and prospects of Australia, a Governor of the Reserve bank of Australia notes:

The last time I gave a speech in Brisbane was three years ago, in June 2004. The key themes of that address were [...] an Australian economy enjoying a long expansion, and a Queensland economy growing faster than the national average. You might be forgiven for saying that not much has changed in the interim. (Stevens, 2007).

While the Assistant Governor of the same institution notes a similarly positive assessment:

The Australian economy has had a lengthy period of expansion. By past standards, we have had reasonably stable growth and low inflation, and the economy has moved closer to full capacity. The short-term outlook for the world economy looks like it will be favourable to further growth in Australia. (Edey, 2007)

What comes across in the texts from 2007 is a consistent message that the condition of the domestic economy in Australia is perceived as positive or “good” (i.e. growing and expanding) by the political elites of the country. This suggests that political figures who would take part in alignment decisions, would have had the same perception. As a final note on the condition of the economy in 2007, there is a remarkable positivity that comes across in the documents from this year. The speakers and reports from 2007 are consistently positive, almost extremely so, even when looking at the more formal reports and documents. This is important when looking to the data for the following years, as although the speakers and formats of overviews remain similar the content and tone changes to a dramatic extent. As such, the evidence makes it clear that, for the year 2007, the perception of the condition of Australia’s domestic economy is ‘positive’. As such, the positive economy would not have posed any constraints on Australia’s alignment decisions.

Australia would neither have been concerned with having to spend needed resources as part of the alignment commitment, nor be concerned with economic backlash from China.

Having examined the condition of Australia's domestic economy, the next section moves to an examination of the perception of electoral concerns in the same period.

Perception of electoral concerns – 2007

Turning to the next domestic-level factor, this section explores the perception of electoral concerns in the 2007 time period and its impact on Australia's alignment decision. It is notable that 2007 was an election year, and that John Howard was running for what would have been his fifth term in office (Johnston, 2007) against opposition Labor Leader Kevin Rudd. The election itself was expected, (i.e. it was at the end of the completion of a regular term in office) and texts that are either pro-own party or anti-opposition party are, as could be expected, fairly spread out over the year, and representative of a variety of actors. These include texts by the Minister of Foreign affairs: 'Who would lead Australia's foreign policy under a Rudd government?' (October 2007); 'Kevin Rudd's Vote of 'No Confidence' in his own team' (June 2007); as well as speeches: 'A Narrative of Success' (January 2007), and media sources.

While the election itself was expected, the data evidences that it was a difficult election fight for the incumbent leader. Prime Minister Howard himself described the 2007 election as: "this is the toughest election I have had in the last decade or more ... The longer you're in office the tougher it is" (Howard, 2007b). While a number of media and academic sources highlight that the Prime Minister had been consistently polling behind his opponent "All polls for a year before the election pointed to a Labor victory" (Bongiorno, 2008, p. 591); while a late, sole election debate was also viewed by media sources and the public to be a loss for Prime Minister Howard, (Grattan, 2007; Murphy & Schubert, 2007). This loss of popularity by Mr. Howard was observed in the data as reflecting the suggestion that voters were "ready for a change" (Johnston, 2007; "Howard, Rudd differences in spotlight", 2007). With Mr. Howard being seen as being out of touch with voters, and

specifically unpopular with Chinese-Australians, with the implication that Mr. Howard's tougher stance on Asia and Asian migrants was stirring racial divisions in Australia (Coorey, 2017; Perry, 2007). On this, Mr. Rudd can be seen to highlight that particular difference, showcasing his own interest in China and describing himself as an "unemployed diplomat who speaks Chinese" (Howard & Rudd 2007) during the election debate. This showcases a more direct connection to Chinese-Australians, and potentially China itself, early on through a potential Rudd victory. Mr. Rudd playing up his personal connection to China suggests a level of opportunism in his electoral campaign, wherein he would be less likely to take alignment decisions or other policy approaches that would alienate China.

This difference in approaches can be seen throughout the material relating to the election from this time period. In their respective speeches before the election, Prime Minister Howard highlights the important relationship between Australia and the United States in the context of calling them "our great ally" (Howard, 2007d). While also highlighting his (Howard's) work in foreign policy that allowed Australia to overcome "opponents" in the "leaders of Asia" (Howard, 2007d) implying that this has led to fruitful economic advantages for Australia. In contrast, Mr. Rudd distances himself from America by highlighting Australia's need to exit Iraq, and offers a multitude of changes and emphasizes: "[a]fter 11 years Mr. Howard has become stuck in the past. He simply doesn't understand the new challenges that we face in the future [...] The challenge of the rise of China and India. (Rudd, 2007a).

This divide, that Mr. Howard presents 'more of the same' and that Mr. Rudd presents an introduction of change is also a consistent thread throughout the time period in the texts and transcripts of the candidates themselves. That is to say, that there is repeated evidence of Mr. Howard expressing the sentiment that he 'knows' what is needed for Australia, and will continue to deliver along the same lines as he has previously: "No, no sensible conservative people, they would understand me, they would understand because it's their view" (Howard, 2007c); "I know the politics of just about every seat in this country I understand that and people will say that" (Howard, 2007b). While Mr. Rudd poses himself as someone to challenge the 'status quo':

The way forward for Australia is to elect a new Prime Minister and a new government with fresh ideas to meet the challenges of the future [...] Australia needs new leadership with fresh ideas for the future. (Rudd, 2007a)

This sentiment is also visible in the election debate where Mr. Rudd and Mr. Howard express polarized views on some of the most controversial issues in Australia at the time (i.e. climate change, taking troops out of Iraq, and the ‘apology’⁴⁴ issue) (Howard & Rudd 2007). Thus, looking to the data, it is clear that Mr. Rudd is clearly pushing for more enacting more changes than Mr. Howard should he win the election (Howard & Rudd 2007).

The data from 2007 can be seen as providing confirmation to the thought that heads of state and government are perhaps the most powerful forces in shaping policy (Streeck & Thelen, 2005; March & Olsen, 1989; Schweller, 2004). While the election of 2007 may first come across as evidence of a perception of electoral concerns, it cannot be considered as such because no evidence can be seen as to suggest that the election caused any change in the alignment decisions of Mr. Howard. Rather, the evidence found suggests that the election encouraged Mr. Howard to commit more to what he was already engaged in or with, i.e. the Quad. Suggesting that, had he not lost the election, the Quad may have continued, but this is pure speculation. Rather, what comes across from the data in 2007, is that the direction of the Prime Minister is an important aspect to consider in a state’s alignment decisions than simply the existence of an election. Therefore, the perceived threat to Australia’s (governmental and) domestic stability cannot be seen as contributing to the domestic-level costs of 2007. This is because, regardless of the election, Mr. Rudd was unable to begin enacting any changes until the following year, and Mr. Howard cannot be seen to have been influenced by the election in a way that suggests that he would have changed his pre-existing stances and direction in the context of Alignment decisions.

⁴⁴ The ‘apology’ issue has been a long standing controversial subject in Australia. It refers to the polarized opinions held in Australia on whether the government should apologize to the Indigenous peoples of Australia for past actions such as forced assimilation and removal of children from their parents. More information on this topic can be found by visiting the National Museum of Australia online.

Summary – 2007

Looking to the events of 2007, there is clear evidence of Australia's decision to align through its participation as a member of the Quad; as well as a high perception of threat regarding China and low domestic-level costs. The latter being reflected in the indicators of a perception of a 'good' domestic economic condition, and electoral concerns that suggest a further commitment to alignment rather than the converse. This reflects the theoretical expectations of balance of threat, and the hypothesis that an absence of domestic-level factors in the face of system-level threat leads to alignment.

4.3 The cessation of the Quad - 2008

Australia's perception of threat - 2008

The following section examines Australia's perception of threat in the context of China for the year of 2008. The year 2008 was markedly different from that of 2007 in that perception of a threat from China is more direct. There is still evidence of concern with the threat of China in the context of climate change threats, but there is also more evidence of a perception of threat in Australia's increased concern with China's military spending, power shifts, and regional instability.

Documents from across multiple levels of Australian government provide evidence of these concerns. A connection between the threat of China and climate change, the latter which Rudd calls "nothing less than a threat to our people, our nation and our planet." (Rudd, 2008f) can be seen repeatedly in speeches by the Prime Minister from 2008. The Prime Minister underlines that China presents a threat in a number of contexts: "Multilateral action with China on climate change is also a major challenge" (Rudd, 2008e); "How could it be that we pioneered breakthrough solar technology in Australia and the previous government sat idly by while we lost that technology to China." (Rudd, 2008f). While Mr.

Rudd also offers a retrospective assessment pointing to the 2009 Australian Defence White Paper (written in 2008), which “explicitly named China's expanding military budget and its unexplained regional deployments” (Rudd, 2019) as the reason for Australia’s own increased military spending. Mr. Rudd implies that this increased military spending was the direct result of a perception of a high-level of perception of threat in stating that this same white paper was “that blunt in identifying the emerging China challenge”⁴⁵ (Rudd, 2019), which can be taken as evidence of a continued concern in Australia with a potential threat involving China.

Stephen Smith, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of the 2008 Rudd government, highlights a number of “international security challenges” (Smith, 2008b, p. 1) facing Australia, and in a section on the tensions arising over contested areas in the East China Sea, states: “Our region still contains potential security flashpoints, where political miscalculations of adventurism could have dramatically adverse consequences for Japan, Australia and our region as a whole.” (Smith, 2008b, p. 15). The Foreign Affairs and Trade minister also touches upon changing power shifts in the region and China’s military spending: “the global strategic balance is changing. Two of the world’s largest military forces, China and India, are in Asia.” (Smith, 2008b: p. 10). Sentiments reiterated in a speech on Australia, ASEAN and the Asia-pacific:

East Asian⁴⁶ military spending alone is now equivalent to that of all the European NATO countries combined [...] world economic and political influence continues its inexorable shift to Asia [...] the challenges we face are substantial [...] shifts in the distribution of strategic, economic and military influence within the international system. (Smith, 2008d).

Statements reflecting a preoccupation with China’s role in changing or shifting power and influence are also seen at other levels as well. Australian Prime Minister Rudd also notes

⁴⁵ In the text the use of ‘that blunt’ suggests that it is referring to the explicit naming of China’s expanding military budget.

⁴⁶ Looking to literature on the topic available from Australian Parliament, “East Asia” includes China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore and Taiwan – but not India. (Emmers and Ravenhill, 2011; Frost, 2009; Toll, 1994)

this change or shift in global power: “there are still many problems in China [...] China's change is having a great impact not just on China, but also on the world [...] The scale and pace of China's economic development and social transformation is unprecedented in human history.” (Rudd, 2008d). As does the Australian Department of Defence in its description of China being “one of two of the most important powers of the next fifty years” (Fitzgibbon, 2008a); and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade who describes China as an “emerging, great power” (Smith, 2008e). Alluding repeatedly to changing power dynamics provides evidence that Australian political figures are preoccupied with the question of what these changes mean to Australia and its allies.

The data presented above regarding Australia’s continued preoccupation with China in the context of its role in global warming, potential for instability and changing global power dynamics and an increased concern with China’s military spending, provides evidence that there was a high-level of perception of threat in the 2008 period, this means that it can be expected that Australia would remain committed to external alignment. Yet, Australia’s decision in 2008 is to distance itself from the grouping, which is counter to balancing theory expectations, thus the next section examines Australia’s alignment decisions and the ways in which the domestic-level costs under consideration could have impacted this.

Australia’s alignment decisions – 2008

Having found evidence of a high-level of perception of threat in 2008, this section presents the finding of Australia’s alignment decisions in the context of alignment in the face of a high-level of threat. While mentions of the Quad in 2007 were primarily infrequent and indirect, the Quad, and Australia’s decision to depart from it, is mentioned directly and indirectly much more in 2008. Supporting the fact that Australia decided not to continue their alignment with the Quad in 2008 no events were planned nor took place under the Quad cooperation. Thus, this section focuses on the texts and documents that provide evidence of Australia’s decision not to align. This is both in terms of distancing from it and reasons for its eventual end.

In a retrospective article, Mr. Rudd notes that it was made clear that Australia would not be continuing its participation in the Quad in approximately March 2008; “That brings us to the United States. As Prime Minister, I visited Washington in March 2008 just after we had made clear that we would not be continuing Australian participation with the Quad.” (Rudd, 2019), creating a timeline of the decision at the highest level of Australian Government. The Australian Foreign Minister, however, made it clear that it was his belief that Australia would not be part of the Quad as early as the first week of February 2008; “One of the things which caused China concern last year was a meeting of that strategic dialogue [...] but we're not proposing to have a dialogue along the lines as occurred last year” (Smith, 2008). This mention of the Quad and China’s opposition of it, and thus the connection between the two is a common thread, however, no direct statement of explanation has been given for leaving the Quad in 2008. There is, however, a general belief by analysts, political figures and those in the media that the decision to leave the Quad was due to a desire to appease China (Buchan & Rimland, 2020; Tow, 2019).

The idea that Australia’s departure from the Quad was the result of pressure from China can be found repeatedly across a variety of sources inside and outside the government sphere. Although the Prime Minister of Australia refuted this belief: “a number of right-wing Quad zealots [...] insisted that the reason the Quad didn't proceed was [...] allegedly because I was [...] keen to appease Beijing”, (Rudd, 2019). (Doogue, 2008); “The 2007 dialogue died a premature death when Kevin Rudd-led Australia buckled under Chinese pressure” (Talukdar, 2017). Other sources offer additional speculative answers to the question of the ending of the Quad, however, no official statements were given as to the reason.

This idea that the end of the Quad was specifically due to a desire to appease China is significant, as the year 2008 presented unprecedented domestic conditions [see condition of the domestic economy – 2008; and perception of electoral concerns – 2008] that lends credibility to the idea that Rudd, too, would have also positioned Australia to leave the Quad due to his own reticence to alienate China. This, Australia’s decision to withdraw from the Quad, contradicts the result one could expect on the basis of a continued

high level of perceived threat in 2008. This discrepancy between system-level pressure (the perception of threat) and Australia's alignment decisions suggests that additional factors play a role. The following two sections provide insights into the domestic-level conditions thought to have disrupted or "intervened" a balancing reaction in spite of this perception of threat.

Condition of Australia's domestic economy – 2008

In order to explain the observed discrepancy between system-level pressure (the level of perceived threat) and Australia's alignment decisions (Australia's withdrawal from the Quad) this section explores the condition of Australia's domestic economy at the time period of 2008 and the impact that could have had on Australia's alignment decisions. The economic condition of Australia in 2008 was drastically different from the previous year, given that the condition of the domestic economy was positive and growing in 2007, while 2008 saw the start of the global financial crisis, an uncertain economic future, and a negative economic condition. For alignment, the negative perception of the economic condition would have imposed more severe constraints on alignment decisions, given a lessened ability to commit Australia's resources to participate in an alignment, and greater sensitivity to consequences that may have arisen from alienating China as an economic resource.

Statements regarding the economic condition in 2008 were plentiful and direct. The Governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia noted the downturn facing Australia and the rest of the world: "The Australian economy has seen a significant change in circumstances over the past six months [...] Our households, like those elsewhere, have observed financial turmoil and a decline in share prices and have become more cautious." (Stevens, 2008). This observation was also expressed by the Prime Minister, whom touched on the negative (i.e. recession, economic downturn) condition of the Australian economy. In a 2008 Address to the Nation the Prime Minister directly states: "the truth is that we are going through the worst financial crisis in our lifetime. I've described it as the economic equivalent of a national security crisis [...] those tough times have now arrived" (Rudd,

2008b); as did the Treasurer of Australia: “We're in the middle of the worst financial crisis ever to confront the modern market economy” (Staff Reporters, 2008). Documents by the Australian Minister of Trade also provide evidence of this negative economic condition. In a speech entitled “Meeting the Challenges”, the Trade Minister notes that Australian exports are already underperforming in early 2008, and that “[t]he [Australian] Government is acting quickly to put in place the policies, programs and infrastructure necessary to address these and other challenges facing Australia.” (Crean, 2008). Which evidences that the Australian government was experiencing the recession in the early months of the year, and was already acting to counter it. This reflects the notion that shifts in the ‘institutional power’ of the state itself can impact systems-level pressures to align through the allocation of resources as well as which the particular ideas (or issues) that are most pressing to a populace and government (Kitchen, 2009).

In addition, a timeline of Australia’s domestic economic condition in the context of the global financial crisis can be observed in the texts and documents of a variety of actors. Mr. Rudd outlines in 2009 that: “[i]n the space of just 18 months, this crisis has become one of the greatest assaults on global economic stability to have occurred in three-quarters of a century” (Rudd, 2009). As did the Secretary to the Australian Treasury, whom outlined the timing of the global financial crisis (GFC) in a more exact manner: “However, even in early 2008, the global financial crisis was already on the scene, with possible serious flow-on implications for global growth” (Kennedy, 2009). While the Trade Minister also noted that Australia had already seen the effects of the GFC in the January to March 2008 period: “Our exports have underperformed [...] The economic policy directions taken in the next 12 months will be critical.” (Crean, 2008) This data provides evidence that the perception of condition of the domestic economic was negative or “bad”. Thus, the economic constraints would have made external alignment against China more costly, and could have had an impact on Australia’s alignment decisions in the context of the Quad, even in early 2008.

The timing of the global financial crisis and of Australia’s decision to cease participation in the Quad is significant given China is seen as an especially important trading partner in

2008, especially given the negative condition of Australia's domestic economy. This can be seen in the texts of a variety of political levels and sectors. Including the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia: "the fortunes of the Chinese economy are increasingly important, particularly for Australia and other countries in our time zone." (Stevens, 2008). As well as the Prime Minister of Australia:

the important thing is, to take our current relationship with China to a new level. I believe that the economic opportunities between us are significant [...] China which has got great economic opportunities [...] for us [...] huge opportunity for Australian business. (Rudd, 2008)

The Prime Minister also highlights the damage that could still be done to the world economy if China was to stop their beneficial spending and notes rather tellingly that "this looms as a challenge for statecraft; we cannot simply hope that individual market participants somehow magically do the right thing" (Rudd, 2009). While another opinion piece written by Mr. Rudd after Australia left the Quad, reiterates the importance that China had as a source of positive economic growth for Australia and the rest of the world during the GFC (Rudd, 2019).

The importance of the overlap of the timing the global financial crisis, and Australia's decision to formally distance itself from the Quad cannot be dismissed. In 2008, facing the contraction of the economy, and with alignment against China becoming increasingly costly due to China's increasing economic importance for Australia, the perception of the negative condition of the domestic economy in 2008 contributed to a high-level of domestic-level costs; which would have disincentivized Australia from external alignment despite a perception of threat. Thus, in other words, the domestic economic condition could have provided enough impetus for Australia to "ignore" its overall threat perception from China, to that of the more immediate and present "domestic threat" of the economic crisis. Having now examined the Australian economic condition in 2008, this thesis now turns to the perception of the electoral concerns for the same year.

Perception of electoral concerns – 2008

In addition to the contribution of economic aspect in Australia's decision to align, the political dimensions of domestic-level costs can also work for or against alignment, in constraining (or freeing) the choices political leaders are able to make. Thus, this section turns to the next aspect of domestic-level factors to explore how perceived threat to Australia's (governmental and) domestic stability impacted Australia's alignment decisions.

As previously mentioned, the end of 2007 saw the loss of one longstanding Prime Minister, John Howard, to make way for a new one, Kevin Rudd. Looking to the early days of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's office, the data shows alignment with the notion that political leaders enjoy more freedom of decisions within the early days of a term in office. The first mention of the decision to leave was within 80 days of his election (from 25 November 2007 to the first week of February 2008 [Smith]). While Rudd himself noted that the official departure occurred: "in March 2008 [...] we had made clear that we would not be continuing Australian participation with the Quad" (Rudd, 2019), which also falls within the first 100 days of his term in office. This timing is also reflected in a number of other policy changes Rudd highlights and carries out early in his days in office, (Rudd, 2008c; "Combat troops to come home from Iraq", 2007). These changes provide support to the notion that the agency held by political figures (a domestic-level factor⁴⁷) are important in alignment decisions (system-level), and that a new government has more freedom of decision. The departure from the Quad can also be seen as an effort by the Rudd government to differentiate itself from the Howard government, and reflective of changing priorities in the governments (Parliament of Australia, 2008b) as with a number of the other early changes the government made, and with the changing importance of the issues facing the population of Australia, as mentioned in the previous section (i.e. the downturn in the domestic economy).

⁴⁷ Or even individual level.

Documents also support that notion that the perception of electoral concerns, and thereby the political environment of 2008, led to Australia's decision not to continue with the alignment. In a retrospective, former Prime Minister Rudd noted that Australia's continued participation in the Quad would have brought forth a "not insignificant question of Australian national interests" in 2008 the context of Australia's own "bilateral relationship with China" (Rudd, 2019). This sentiment, and Rudd's opinion that participation in the Quad would be "embroiling" Australia in an "emerging military alliance with Japan against China" (Rudd, 2019) suggests that participation in the Quad was concerning for Rudd in the context of his own continued political career. This is further supported by Rudd's description that "any talk of the Quad was political anathema" (Rudd, 2019) – essentially a subject that was capable of contributing damage to a political career.

Documents from 2008 support this retrospective in a number of ways. The Australian Minister for Trade noted in mid-2008 that a commitment to the Quad would restrict the government's ability to freely navigate a bilateral relationship with China (Smith, 2008c). While Rudd also states in 2008 that "I believe that the economic opportunities between us [Australian and China] are significant [...] we need to have a strategic discussion about that, long term - China's interest, our national interests." (Rudd, 2008) In addition, Rudd alludes in 2008 to the fact that his perception of the Quad is that of a defence grouping, framing the Quad as Howards attempt to "quadrilateralize" (Rudd, 2008) Howards security agreement with Japan. Further stating:

I don't think that's an appropriate direction for us to go at this stage [...] how do you unfold a future relationship with China which has got great economic opportunities [...] But is that enhanced or helped in any way but some sort of quadrilateral relationship with New Delhi? I don't think so. (Rudd, 2008)

In addition to showcasing evidence that the Quad was still being debated as the GFC developed, this belays the political and economic cost of alignment decisions that the Prime Minister alluded to in his retrospective. Meaning that by not committing itself to the Quad, Australia's government would have more freedom, whereas there would be a political (and economic) cost in alienating China by electing to commit to the Quad.

Thus, the data from 2008 shows that perception of electoral concerns would have contributed to a high level of domestic costs. While at first glance the data appears to suggest that Mr. Rudd enjoyed a low-level of political costs associated with his decision to leave the Quad, the impact of the GFC and the increased importance of the Australia-China relationship from an economic and political standpoint evident that the alignment decision to depart the Quad was a matter of electoral concern. Thus, Australia's decision to depart the Quad can be seen as the Prime Minister avoiding a high-level political (and economic) cost. In other words, continuing with the Quad could have led to a scenario where China would be less likely to trade favorably with Australia, seeing the Quad as an antagonistic grouping, which would have also led to political implications for those in power.

Summary – 2008

Looking to the events of 2008, there is clear evidence of Australia's decision to cease its alignment as a member of the Quad, as well as high domestic-level costs, and a high perception of threat regarding China. The domestic-level costs are reflected in the indicators of a perception of a 'bad' or negative domestic economic condition, and electoral concerns that suggest that alignment was seen as having political and economic consequences regardless of the presence of threat. This supports the hypothesis that high domestic-level costs can circumvent balancing expectations.

4.4 The reformation of the Quad - 2017

Australia's perception of threat – 2017

Whereas the previous sections have focused on Australia's decision to participate in the Quad (2007) and the reversal of this decision (2008), the following sections turn to Australia's renewed decision to align with the Quad and the revival of the format. Australia's perception of threat, in the context of China, is even more apparent in 2017, than previously seen in 2007 and 2008. It is such that the documents and texts examined bring evidence of a perception of China's threat directly to the forefront. Such as in a rather ominous keynote speech for a regional security summit, wherein the Prime Minister of

Australia noted the current “Manichaeian”⁴⁸ (Turnbull, 2017a) choice facing the world today. Australia’s Prime Minister borrows a Chinese proverb: “Big fish eat small fish and small fish eat shrimps” (Turnbull, 2017a) that is in close alignment with a later assessment in his speech about how the world, including Australia, perceives China in one of the most direct vocalisations of the threat China poses. In the same speech, the Australian Prime Minister pointedly states: “[s]ome fear that China will seek to impose a latter-day Monroe Doctrine on this hemisphere in order to dominate the region, marginalising the role and contribution of other nations, in particular the United States.” (Turnbull, 2017a)). This perception of threat can be seen expressed by a variety of actors and in a number of documents; “latent security tensions that are now palpable on the Korean peninsula, in the East and South China seas and further afield” (Turnbull, 2017a); “change, unprecedented in its scale and pace, is the tenor of our times. These are [...] also times of uncertainty, of risk, indeed of danger.” (Australian Government⁴⁹, 2017); and “The South China Sea is a major fault line in the regional order.” (Australian Government, 2017, p. 46). These tensions all have an additional military dimension, wherein China is implied by the Australian Defence Minister to be contributing to the military might of other antagonistic countries in the context of nuclear and weapons capabilities, “China is the source of the majority, 95 percent, of direct investment into North Korea.” (Bishop, 2017). As it is also perceived by policy analysts: “China’s militarisation of the South China Sea [...] has brought its power-projection capabilities 1200km closer to Australia’s northern approaches.” (Nicholson, 2017b). Again echoing a concern with proximal factors.

In addition, the documents and texts examined show Australia’s preoccupation with Chinese threat in the context of a number of issues relating to a sense of China overreaching its influence and dominance in Australia. These include a fear that there is “growing leverage over academia” by China (Cave & Williams, 2017), whereby Australian Universities in 2017 were becoming increasingly dependent on the tuition paid by Chinese students, and “that Beijing is using this leverage to stifle critical views” (Cave & Williams,

⁴⁸ Manichaeian: A term that represents the face-off or struggle between a good, spiritual world of light, and the evil of a material world of darkness.

⁴⁹ The Prime Minister’s introduction, no page number.

2017). This again implies a preoccupation with dominance and sovereignty concerns, i.e. China infringing on freedom of expression by overreaching into Australia. Another instance of which includes a 2017 political scandal wherein monetary contributions were made to Australian political figures from a variety of actors in and associated with China: “Australia’s intelligence chief had identified two prominent businessmen of Chinese descent, who have donated millions across the political spectrum in recent years, as possible agents for the Chinese government” (Cave & Williams, 2017). In response, the Australian Government put legislation in place to discourage and fight “growing attempts by foreign governments or their proxies to exert inappropriate influence on and to undermine Australia’s sovereign institutions and decision making.” (Australian Government, 2017, p. 75) More specifically: “the laws would criminalise acts such as opposition senator Sam Dastyari's alleged soliciting of a donation from a Chinese businessman, Huang Xiangmo, to cover personal expenses.” (Birtles, 2017). These actions were perceived by figures in China to have been focused against them, although at the time they were put in place, Australia claimed this was not the case. (Greene, 2017)

Indeed, the words of the Australian Prime Minister come across as being against China, or specifically perceiving China as a threat towards Australia, Australian sovereignty, and Australian domestic concerns: “just as modern China was based on an assertion of national sovereignty, so China should always respect the sovereignty of other nations including, of course, our own.” (Turnbull, 2017b); “Modern China was founded in 1949 with these words, The Chinese people have stood up' [...] ‘and we stand up and so we say, the Australian people stand up.’” (Turnbull, 2017c). This blatant perception of threat can be seen as offering evidence of the sentiment that “China’s growing influence on the regional and global issues of greatest consequence to our security and prosperity” (Australian Government , 2017, p. 37).

This is further confirmed with additional evidence of concern with the potential for misunderstandings and the threat that provides the region surrounding Australia and its allies: “an era of shifting power balances and greater rivalry [...] as China’s power grows, tensions could also flare between them [China and the United States]” (Australian

Government, 2017, p. 38-39). This highlights that there is a very present perception of the threat China poses to Australia currently as well as possibly in the future with the gravity of the impact of China's actions.

Additionally, there is an economic dynamic to threat present in 2017: "economic and security interests are converging [...] Australia must be sovereign, not reliant" (Australian Government⁵⁰, 2017); "tensions could also flare between them over trade and other economic issues. Australia will [work to] ensure economic tension between [China and the United States] does not fuel strategic rivalry or damage the multilateral trading system." (Australian Government, 2017, p. 38-39) This provides significant evidence of the intersection of economic concerns and threat in the context of China. There are also recurring implicit references that highlight this preoccupation on the danger of "reliance"⁵¹, as well as statements about being in a period of flux, or change, and an awareness of the danger this holds for the economy: "it remains possible that escalating geopolitical tensions and increased global trade protectionism could derail the current economic expansion" (The Reserve Bank of Australia, 2017); "The uncertainty surrounding China's growth outlook has implications for Australian resource exports, commodity prices and the terms of trade." (The Reserve Bank of Australia, 2017).

Thus, the data from 2017 supports the argument that Australia had a high-level of perception of threat of China given the diverse and continued ways in which China is shown to present a threat to Australia. Having now explored Australia's threat perception in 2017, the next section turns to Australia's alignment decisions in the same period to explore how perception of threat affected Australia's decision to re-align with the Quad.

Australia's alignment decisions – 2017

This section explores Australia's alignment with the Quad in 2017. It is quite apparent, in looking to political and media sources in 2017, that there is a consensus that Australia made

⁵⁰ The Prime Minister's introduction, no page number.

⁵¹ This can be seen in the fear that Australian Universities were "dependent on the tuition paid by Chinese students" (Cave and Williams) (see Perception of Threat – 2017),

the decision to participate in the reformation of the Quad in 2017 (as well as in following years). This is evident in the documents from a variety of political levels in Australia, such as in the Prime Minister's contribution to the issue of joint statements on the revival and continuation of the Quads. All four members released statements about the continuation, the content of the statement was largely the same, with an Australia media release noting that: "[t]he participants committed to continuing quadrilateral discussions and deepening cooperation on the basis of shared values and principles." (Australian Government, 2017b). As well Prime Minister Turnbull in stated that he: "look[ed] forward to those discussions and that engagement progressing" (Turnbull, 2017e), when asked whether the Quad would "be rebooted" during a doorstep for the 2017 East Asia Summit (Turnbull, 2017e). Another meeting between Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Japanese Prime Minister Abe in 2017 also highlighted the cooperation and the desired outcomes of the Quad: "Japan and Australia will continue to work proactively, alongside the US and other like-minded countries, including India, to maintain the rules-based international order and support a peaceful and stable Indo-Pacific region." (Turnbull, 2017g) While the Defence Minister expressed that: "Australia is very interested in a quadrilateral engagement with India, Japan and the United States" (Bishop, 2017).

A wide range of media sources provide extra insight into the Quad and Australia's participation in 2017. Meetings between members received significant media attention – "India, Japan, Australia and the US met on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit in Manila on Sunday as the quadrilateral security dialogue took shape" (Talukdar, 2017); and "Senior officials from the United States, Japan, India, and Australia met in Manila on Saturday [...] to discuss regional and global cooperation." (Panda, 2017), during the 2017 East Asia Summit, wherein each country released a statement, which they expressed their "committed to continuing quadrilateral discussions" (Panda, 2017). As well as being noted in a retrospective by the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia, with the statement that "the Quad has had two meetings since it was reconstituted last year, and I am confident that it will become an important part of our regional diplomacy." (Australian Government, 2018) Thus, it is reasonable to say, looking back to the events of

2017 and those following, that Australia's alignment decisions in 2017 illustrate both the general reformation of the Quad, as well as Australia's recommitment to the formation. Having now looked to Australia's decision to participate in the renewal of the Quad and the revival of the format in 2017 as well as the system-level factor of threat related to this decision, the next sections explore the domestic-level factors coinciding with this decision.

Condition of Australia's domestic economy – 2017

Having explored system-level pressures in the perception of threat and Australia's alignment decisions within the 2017 period, the following sections turn to the domestic-level costs present in 2017. This section turns first to the condition of Australia's domestic economy and its potential impact on Australia's alignment decisions. The condition of the Australian economy in 2017 can be seen as positive (i.e. growing, not stagnating or in a recession).

Positive assessments of the Australian economic condition are direct and plentiful across the documents examined, with multiple actors and sectors referring to a positive (i.e. good) economic condition. Including the Australian Prime Minister: "So as we face the future, we have very good reason to be optimistic. Our economy is growing." (Turnbull, 2017f). As well as documents from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: "our [Australia's] strong economy", (Australian Government, 2017); and the Minister for Trade Tourism and Investment: "Australia's economy is now growing at a faster rate than all other major developed economies." (Ciobo, 2017). The Governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia also notes that: "Financial conditions remain favourable" (Lowe, 2017). The common thread across all of the documents and texts examined regarding 2017 is of a positive economic condition within Australia.

Yet, there is a slight underlying sense of caution in 2017, which can largely be seen as a response of the events of the global financial crisis of 2008. Nearly ten years after the GFC, Reserve Bank of Australia noted that: "[h]ousehold consumption growth is forecast to pick up a little, but to a rate that is lower than the average seen prior to the financial crisis" (The

Reserve Bank of Australia, 2017). While the Assistant Governor of the body that issued the report remarked that:

The Bank's work on financial stability has evolved over the past 20 years and particularly since the financial crisis. At the big picture level, the way we look at it hasn't changed that much [...] But we are even more attuned to the tail risks than we were and more attuned to the need to take action if we sense that the risks are building. We are, as are policymakers globally, more sensitive to risk. (Bullock, 2017).

This can also be seen in documents from the Australian treasury in 2017, such as a mid-year speech that highlights “slower productivity growth” yet emphasizes that “[a]s we are currently emerging from the tail end of that major cyclical event there is some cause for optimism.” (Australian Government The Treasury, 2017) Thereby, it can be said that these cautionary words are that simply that – cautionary, not a sign of a negative economic condition. Meaning that although Australia is – in the words of its own government – “more sensitive to risk” (Bullock, 2017) the condition of the Australian economy is not such that it would have disincentivised Australia from external alignment.

Thus, the data from 2017 shows that the condition of the domestic economy in Australia is “positive” – it is growing, gaining strength and seen as being ‘good’ and strong. While Australia is more subdued in its reporting of such, this evidences heightened risk sensitivity rather than a negative condition. As such the contribution of this factor to domestic-level costs can be said to be low because, regardless of a sense of caution, the condition of the domestic economy is positive overall. This positive condition of the domestic economy would, therefore, not have contributed to increased domestic-level costs. Now having examined the domestic economy in 2017, the next section looks to the perceived threat to Australia’s (governmental and) domestic stability in the same time period, to analyse the impact it would have had on Australia’s alignment decisions.

Perception of electoral concerns – 2017

Document from the year 2017 provide plentiful evidence of a clear sentiment of present and growing concern regarding global and regional instability during the period, however there is little evidence of electoral concerns. The year 2017 was not an election year for Australia, with the closest election at the Prime Minister level being held just a few months prior, on July 2nd 2016. As previously noted in ‘perception of electoral concerns – 2008’ it is not unheard of for Australia to see the ousting of a sitting Prime Minister and new elections within even this short of a time period (Miletic, 2015). Regardless, however, there is limited evidence that such electoral concerns were felt by the new Prime Minister during this period. Opinion polls from the year show that while Mr. Turnbull suffered some unpopularity, it was not to a degree that would call into question his standing as Prime Minister: “Labor retains thumping 54% to 46% lead over Coalition in the latest survey even as 40% of voters prefer Turnbull as prime minister compared with Shorten’s 28%” (Murphy, 2017); “An analysis of 6943 voters in Newspoll surveys taken between February and April reveals a deepening frustration with both major party leaders, with Mr Turnbull’s net satisfaction rating declining by five percentage points since August while the Opposition Leader’s fell by nine” (Crowe, 2017), findings that were also echoed by international media sources, which noted the Prime Minister was losing ground to “Trump-style Australian Populists” (Heath, 2017).

It is also clear, looking to the timing of Australia’s return to the Quad, that the decision was not made within the first 100 days of the Prime Minister’s term. The first mention of a return to the Quad was on April 20th 2017: “Australia is very interested in a quadrilateral engagement with India, Japan and the United States” (Bishop, 2017) – 292 days after the Prime Minister’s entry into office. Turning to other events of 2017, it is clear that while there is evidence of destabilizing events to some in power (i.e. electoral concerns), they do neither impact the leadership positions (i.e. the Prime Minister) nor suggest economic ramifications in the sense of alienating China to the degree that trade relationships are called into question. As can be seen with Australia’s experience with the political

interference from China in 2017, which resulted in a legislative overhaul of espionage initiatives (Belot, 2017) (see Perception of threat – 2017). Thus, it can be said that the year 2017 was a period of a low electoral concerns, and the documents and sources from the time indicate that the domestic-level costs resulting from both the condition of the domestic economy and electoral concern indicators from 2017 were ‘low’.

Summary – 2017

Looking to the events of 2017, there is clear evidence of Australia’s decision to align again as a member of the Quad, as well as a low domestic-level costs, and a high perception of threat regarding China. The low domestic-level costs are reflected in the indicators of a perception of a positive domestic economic condition, and little evidence of electoral concerns during the time period.

5. Conclusion

The aim of the study was to explain the variation in Australia’s alignment decisions through an examination of the impact of domestic-level factors against system-level pressures to balance. For this purpose, the study examined Australia’s alignment decisions in the context of its participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue at three points in time. Seeking to answer the question of: what explains Australia’s alignment decisions vis-à-vis the first formation, cessation and reformation of the Quad over a short period of time, despite the fact that China’s threat trajectory has been continuously on the rise? The theoretical framework used to find the answer to this question was the result of utilizing multiple lenses of analysis. The empirical analysis of this thesis demonstrates that a perception of threat alone does not explain Australia’s alignment decisions across the time period in observation. Only once the perception of threat is examined in combination with domestic factors (i.e. perception of economic condition and electoral concerns) is the observed balancing behaviour of Australia explained.

In order to reach these findings, alignments and alliances were first conceptualized in order to capture the nature of the Quad, which, unlike a traditional alliance, is a much more

flexible and informal formation. Secondly, this was followed by an introduction to theories of alignment formation, with a specific emphasis on balance of threat. Which postulates that threat is the most fundamental cause of alignment formation; and that states ally with or against the most threatening power (Hume, 1994; Walt, 1985). Yet, balance of threat only takes system-level pressures (i.e. threat) into consideration, thus an explanation of the importance of domestic-level factors followed through an examination of neoclassical realism and other approaches. These brought the importance of the influence of domestic-level actors and events to the forefront, and postulated that the system-level pressures of (for example) balance of threat, must be translated through intervening domestic-level variables (Rosecrance, et. al, 1993; Kitchen, 2010) in order to gain a greater understanding of alignment formation. Drawing on a study by Barnett and Levy (1991), two primary domestic-level factors – together, domestic-level costs – were singled out as being of particular importance, and were adjusted to be reflective of an advanced democratic state; the condition of the domestic economy, and electoral concerns.

As such, this thesis looked to data from 2007 to present, with a particular focus on 2007, 2008, and 2017, to observe any connections between domestic-level factors and system-level pressures to balance. The findings from 2007 were of a high perception of threat and low domestic-level costs, as well as a positive alignment decision; while the findings from 2008, were of a high perception of threat, high domestic-level costs, and a negative alignment decision. Finally, the findings from 2017 were of a continued high perception of threat, as well as low domestic-level costs and a return to a positive alignment decision. The data thereby demonstrates that a perception of threat alone does not explain Australia's alignment decisions across the time period in observation. Only once the perception of threat is examined in combination with domestic factors (i.e. perception of economic condition and electoral concerns) is the observed balancing behaviour of Australia explained. Thus, the theoretical expectations that high domestic-level costs act as an intervening variable in the face of system-level pressures to align are confirmed. With this, the thesis has achieved its aim and provided insights into how domestic-level factors shape alignment decisions against system-level pressures to align. Highlighting the importance of

taking domestic-level factors into consideration when examining alignment decisions against system-level pressures such as threat.

The findings, however, must be prefaced with the limitations of this study. First, this study was limited to a single-case analysis and a sole perspective, yet the Quad was a grouping of four states, and a cross-case analysis would have been beneficial to explore whether domestic-level conditions also mediated the alignment decisions of the other members, although they showed less behavioural variation. As the limitations and constraints of a master's thesis would not have made such a study possible, this approach and these findings could provide the starting point for a further study of the Quad, or other alignments occurring within similar contexts. Second, and relating to the beneficial nature of a cross-case analysis, the scope of this thesis meant that a more thorough understanding of the Prime Ministers' decisions, moving beyond domestic level constraints to the individual level, were not possible. The neoclassical realist literature examined during this course of this thesis has posited that the agency of a political leader is shaped by the values of a state. This opens up a variety of potential questions (i.e. does Australian culture and thereby Australian political leaders value alignment? Does one political leader value American values and thereby alignment with Americans more than another?) that were not possible to answer within the constraints of this thesis, but would provide greater insight into domestic-level influences in alignment decisions. Finally, as with all studies of this nature, the interpretation of the presence and meaning of perception, and the scope of 'threat' itself, is dependent to an extent upon an author's subjective interpretation. While a strategy of mitigation was put in place by focusing on documents and sources that provided consistency and were representative of a variety of levels of government, policy makers and the public, the concept of 'threat' itself becomes more elusive when subject to diplomatic signaling, such as labeling states or their respective actions 'risks' or 'challenges' rather than using the word 'threat' outright.

Regardless, the findings of this paper connect to the existing literature on the Quad, and provide an examination of Australia's alignment decisions that benefits from both a wider scope and more in-depth exploration than previous studies. First, the finding shows that

domestic-level factors do have an impact on alignment decisions, even in the presence of threat, which demonstrates the value in exploring their impact on the Quad (and other alignments) to continue understanding which domestic-level variables can be thought to be the most influential and impactful. Second, these findings and the topic are timely, given the resurgence in studies on the Quad and China, as well as the current pandemic crisis, which has brought on new threats, economic challenges, and electoral concerns. However, as the events of the pandemic are still on-going, it is not possible to compare the events of 2008 and 2020 in a conclusive way. Comparisons may, however, be possible in the future, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the interaction of domestic-level factors and system-level pressures in alignment decisions. Therefore, it can be said that the findings of this study contribute both to the understanding of the Quad; as well as state alignment decisions in the context of the interaction of domestic-level factors and system-level pressures more generally.

In conclusion, this thesis presented a theoretical framework with which to explore state alignment decisions, and utilized this in an analysis of Australia's alignment decisions within the context of the Quad. By highlighting the importance of domestic-level variables against realist explanations of alignment formation (i.e. balance of threat) this study was able to provide an account of Australia's decisions over a set time period to explain the deviation in Australia's alignment decisions in the Quad (i.e. from alignment (2007), to withdrawal (2008), and again to alignment (2017)) in the face of a perception of a high-level of threat in the context of China. It was observed that Australia did perceive a high-level of threat from China across the time period, but elected to withdraw from the Quad due to the influence of domestic-level factors; the first being the agency of the Australian Prime Minister, and the second being the impact of the economic crisis and Australia's need to engage with China as a trading partner, rather than antagonise the relationship due to the Quad. The findings that resulted from this analysis can therefore be said to contribute to the existing literature on the Quad, and state alignment decisions; and as such, this study have provided an answer to the research question regarding the Australia's deviation of alignment decisions.

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