

POLICY BRIEF

Whither the Quad?

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US President Joe Biden, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Quad Hiroshima Summit, May 20, 2023. Source: MEA Photo Gallery.

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi with Leaders of Pacific Island Countries During the FIPIC Summit at Port Moresby, May 22, 2023. Source: MEA Photo Gallery

India's Aircraft Carriers INS Vikrant and INS Vikramaditya operate together in the Arabian Sea, June 2023. Source: Indian Navy

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Whither the Quad? by Lalit Kapur

Near cancellation of the Quad's third in-person Summit following the Biden decision to cut short his regional tour raised questions about the grouping's continuing relevance. That the leaders were able to carve out a window at Hiroshima, produce a joint statement¹ and a vision statement² and commit to meeting again in India in 2024 indicates that the Quad partners are still convinced about a shared future. The outcomes of their discussions have already been covered by this author separately³.

Divergent perceptions, however, continue to drive strategic commentary about the Quad and its purpose. Is the Quad just a talking shop? Does its current agenda deliver? Is it an anti-China alliance? Will it eventually transform into an Asian NATO? Is India the weak link? How does India's relationship with Russia impact the grouping? Should the military part of the Quad's agenda be strengthened? Should the Quad be institutionalised? Should it be expanded?

This brief seeks to address these issues and assess the future direction of the Quad.

The Quad's Evolution

Perceptions about the Quad are inevitably shaped by its previous incarnation, beginning with the four navies coming together to effectively respond to the earthquake and tsunami of December 26, 2004. The evident benefits of quadrilateral maritime cooperation, and late Japanese PM Shinzo Abe's activism, led diplomatic representatives of the four countries to informally assemble at Manila on the sidelines of the ARF Senior Officials Meeting in May 2007. Ships from the four Quad nations and Singapore even came together for Exercise Malabar in the Bay of Bengal in September 2007. The China of that time, while still hiding its strength and biding its time, reacted angrily. Developed economies were still heavily invested in the prospects of access to

¹ Quad Leaders' Joint Statement, May 20, 2023, <u>https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/36571/Quad_Leaders_Joint_Statement</u>

² Quad Leaders' Vision Statement – Enduring Partners for the Indo-Pacific, May 20, 2023, <u>https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/20/quad-leaders-vision-statement-enduring-partners-for-the-indo-pacific/</u>

³ Lalit Kapur, "The Quad Hiroshima Summit of May 20, 2023" in The Indo-Pacific Monitor, Volume IV Issue 5, May 2023,

https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/indo-pacific-monitor-4906.pdf



China's vast market and hoping to incorporate it into the global system as a responsible stakeholder⁴. So when China formally protested⁵, leaders rapidly disassociated themselves from the Quad, leading to its unceremonious collapse.

The advent of Xi Jinping, however, resulted in China becoming increasingly assertive, re-interpreting treaties it had signed and ratified and pushing to change the status quo in its favour. A changed maritime outlook was pronounced in May 2015, justifying China's unprecedented maritime expansion and sharply increasing the importance of the seas in its strategic calculus. China also expanded its territorial sway at sea and on land, beginning with Scarborough Shoal and going on to Hong Kong, imposing its domestic law on the South China Sea, increasing grey zone activity in the East China Sea, and using economic coercion to bend other countries to its will. A final and legally binding award by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the South China Sea case brought by the Philippines was wilfully flouted. China's asymmetric military and economic attractions helped in imposing its will on Southeast Asian nations despite its changed behaviour.

These actions eventually resulted in the resurrection of the Quad. The beginning came through senior officials of the four countries coming together on the sidelines of the Manila East Asia Summit of 2017⁶. Discussions were elevated to the ministerial level during the UNGA session in New York in 2019⁷. US President Biden further elevated them to the leader level through an online summit in March 2021⁸ and an in-person summit in September 2021⁹. Since 2019, the Quad has seen six ministerial level meetings, five summit-level

⁴ Robert B Zoellick, Deputy Secretary of State, Remarks to National Committee on US-China Relations, "Whither China: From Membership to Responsibility", September 21, 2005, <u>https://2001-2009.state.gov/s/d/former/zoellick/rem/53682.htm</u>

⁵ Brendan Nicholson, "China warns Canberra on security pact, June 15, 2007, <u>https://www.theage.com.au/national/china-warns-canberra-on-security-pact-20070615-ge54v5.html?page=fullpage#contentSwap1</u>

⁶ India-Australia-Japan-US Consultations on Indo-Pacific (November 12, 2017), <u>https://mea.gov.in/press-</u> <u>releases.htm?dtl/29110/IndiaAustraliaJapanUS_Consultations_on_IndoPacific_November_1</u> <u>2_2017</u>

⁷ Japan-Australia-India-US Ministerial, September 26, 2019, <u>https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page3e_001112.html</u>

⁸ Quad Leaders' Joint Statement: "The Spirit of the Quad", March 12, 2021, <u>https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-</u> documents.htm?dtl/33620/Quad_Leaders_Joint_Statement_The_Spirit_of_the_Quad

 ⁹ Joint Statement from Quad Leaders, September 24, 2021, <u>https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/24/joint-statement-from-quad-leaders/</u>

interactions and numerous meetings at the official level, an indication that interest in the engagement remains at a sustained high level.

The Quad's Purpose

The common purpose of the Quad is reckoning "with the most urgent of global challenges"¹⁰. These include the economic and health impacts of COVID-19, combating climate change, addressing shared challenges in cyber space, critical technologies, counterterrorism, quality infrastructure investment, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief and the maritime domains¹¹. This broad purpose remains unaltered, as can be seen from the most recent joint statement¹². Effectively, the Quad's guiding objectives are providing the Indo-Pacific with an alternate source of public goods, thereby preventing the emergence of a hegemonic monopoly. They do not extend to militarily deterring China or demonstrating the primacy of the US.

Indo-Pacific Visions

Two divergent visions for the Indo-Pacific are competing for influence in the region. China's vision, driven by the dream of rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, is based on the portrayal that where the world's leading democracies have failed, its authoritarian model has succeeded in lifting a poor nation out of poverty and is therefore more suited to third world governance. It is defined by the Belt and Road Initiative, through which China exports its excess capacity and builds infrastructure projects enabling exploitation of third world resources, while creating dependencies through elite capture, debt traps and opaque financing conditions. China's vision is further elaborated by its Global Developmental Initiative¹³, Global Security Initiative¹⁴, and Global Civilisation Initiative¹⁵. Their thrust is towards building a China-centric multipolar world (with a unipolar Asia) in which China freely revises long held international

¹⁰ Quad Leaders' Joint Statement: "The Spirit of the Quad", March 12, 2021, <u>https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-</u> documents.htm2dtl/33620/Quad Leaders, Joint Statement, The Spirit of the Quad

documents.htm?dtl/33620/Quad_Leaders_Joint_Statement_The_Spirit_of_the_Quad ¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Quad Leaders' Joint Statement, May 20, 2023, <u>https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/36571/Quad_Leaders_Joint_Statement</u>

¹³ "Bolstering Confidence and Jointly Overcoming Difficulties to Build a Better World", September 21, 2021, <u>https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/202109/t20210922_9580293</u>

<u>html</u> ¹⁴ The Global Security Initiative Concept Paper, February 21, 2023, <u>https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/202302/t20230221_110283</u> <u>48.html</u>

¹⁵ Full text of Xi Jinping's keynote address at the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting, March 15, 2023, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202303/16/WS6412496da31057c47ebb4b23.html



norms, cocks a snook at international tribunals (as in the South China Sea case) and still professes compliance with international law including the UN Convention on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS). The chasm between China's words and deeds has become increasingly visible, yet its market potential and technology continue to lure developed and developing nations alike.

The Quad vision of the Indo-Pacific, on the other hand, is based on the proposition that democracies can deliver international public goods. The commitment, reiterated at the Quad Hiroshima Summit, is towards a region that is peaceful and prosperous, stable and secure, respectful of sovereignty and territorial integrity, free from coercion, where disputes are settled in accordance with international law, and where all countries and people can exercise their choice on how they cooperate and trade based on partnership, equality and mutual respect¹⁶. The objective is acting as a force for good and finding common (and therefore mutually acceptable) solutions for region-wide benefit. The agenda comprises the provision of public goods already covered above. It now also includes respect for the centrality, agency and leadership of regional institutions like ASEAN, the PIF and IORA; and working transparently to implement a practical agenda that delivers sustained economic and social value, is responsive to regional partners and contributes to global priorities. Unlike China's model, where the CCP seeks to impose a China-determined vision, the Quad propagates a consultative vision based on free choice and a region free from domination.

Strategic Drivers

The binding concern may be how China's burgeoning power will impact them, but Quad member countries have substantial differences in their economic interests, threat perceptions, capabilities and strategic outlook.

The economic relationship of Quad partners with China is summarised at Table 1 below. Major coercive levers China uses are restricting access of goods produced by other nations to its market as well as movements of its tourists and students for education abroad. Both measures impact the incomes of Japan, Australia and even the US. Both have limited impact on India: barely 3.4% of India's global exports went to China in 2022, nor is China among the top 15 of

¹⁶ Quad Leaders' vision Statement – Enduring Partners for the Indo-Pacific, May 20, 2023, <u>https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-</u> <u>documents.htm?dtl/36573/Quad_Leaders_Vision_Statement_Enduring_Partners_for_the_I</u> <u>ndoPacific</u>

India's sources of tourist arrivals¹⁷. Curtailing exports would adversely impact China's domestic industry and the highly favourable trade balance. Thus, China's economic attractions for India are far lower than those for other Quad partners.

| Country | Trade with China | | | Investment From / to China | |
|-------------------------|------------------|------------|---------|-------------------------------|-----------|
| | Volume | Dependence | | Inward | Outward |
| | | Exports | Imports | | |
| Australia ¹⁸ | A\$283bn | 30.2% | 22.6% | A\$85.1bn | A\$62.5bn |
| India ¹⁹ | \$113.8bn | 3.4% | 13.8% | N.A. | N.A. |
| Japan ²⁰ | \$ 325 bn | 19.4% | 21% | \$187bn | \$156bn |
| US ²¹ | \$761.7bn | 6.6% | 14.3% | \$118.2bn | \$97.7bn |

Table 1: Quad Trade and Investment Relations with China

An overview of the primary security concerns of Quad partner countries is at Table 2 below. Unlike the US and its Pacific allies, India's concerns span both the continental and maritime domains. In the latter, they cover the entire Indian Ocean and are not limited to the geographic footprint of the US Indo-Pacific Command. On the other hand, while security challenges in the Western Pacific impact the three allies directly, the direct impact on India is somewhat limited.

¹⁷ India Tourism Statistics, 2022, Government of India, Ministry of Tourism, accessed June 8, 2023, <u>https://tourism.gov.in/sites/default/files/2022-09/India%20Tourism%20Statistics%202022%20%28English%29.pdf</u>

 ¹⁸ Trade statistics of the Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, retrieved June 8, 2023, for FY 2021-22, <u>https://www.dfat.gov.au/trade/trade-andinvestment-data-information-and-publications/trade-statistics/trade-time-series-data
</u>

¹⁹ Data from Government of India, Department of Commerce Trade Statistics 2022-23, retrieved on June 9, 2023, <u>https://tradestat.commerce.gov.in/eidb/default.asp</u>

²⁰ Data from Japan's Trade and Investment Statistics retrieved on June 8, 2023, for 2022, https://www.jetro.go.jp/en/reports/statistics.html

²¹ US International Trade in Goods and Services: China, accessed June 8, 2023, https://apps.bea.gov/international/factsheet/factsheet.html#650



| Country | Major Security Priorities | Focus | Threat Mitigation Strategy |
|------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Australia | Balancing against China's power flowing south. | Southern Pacific island nations Maritime | Alliance with US Defence Cooperation Relationships Strengthening own capability. |
| India | Cross-border terrorism Territorial revisionism by China, Pakistan. Instability to West and East. Balancing against China's power flowing into Indian Ocean. | Securing continental borders to west, north and east. Indian Ocean Continental and maritime | Internal balancing. Strengthening regional structures. Partnerships with all, alliance with none. Shaping the regional environment. |
| Japan | Balancing China's power acting east. North Korea Territorial claims on Taiwan, Senkaku Islands. Russia | East Asia Maritime | Alliance with US Strengthening own capability. Defence Cooperation Relationships |
| US (offshore balancer) | Containing China's power flowing east. Supporting regional allies. | Western Pacific Maritime | Forward deployment, contain threat at source. Supporting Taiwan. Alliance system. |

Table 2: Quad Threat Perceptions

For India, concerns regarding China's assertion on the shared (and disputed) continental border and about the strong China-Pakistan nexus must be primary. On the maritime front, the priority concern is countering China's economic and maritime power flowing south and west through the Indonesian



straits and adversely impacting the Indian Ocean region. It is to address this concern that India articulated the SAGAR policy in 2015²². The policy approach is development focused, relying on shaping the regional environment by addressing shared regional challenges and providing alternatives to regional China's influence despite India's lower economic capacity. Much of India's aid in the Indian Ocean littoral is grant-based, with projects being transparently negotiated in consultation with the country concerned. Nevertheless, security is not neglected - India maintains a 24X7 presence in eight key Indian Ocean regions, three each in the western and eastern parts, and two in the Central Indian Ocean. This presence enables quick response to soft security challenges and enables India to be the first responder in disaster scenarios.

India is conscious that the US has no allies or permanent presence in the Indian Ocean. Indian Ocean security has never been enough of a priority to warrant the development of alliances or positioning of forward deployed forces. There is just one logistics support facility at Diego Garcia. The current US Chief of Naval Operations is on record as having placed the Indian Ocean third in his priorities, after the Pacific and Atlantic²³. Capacity constraints and the reality of China's growing maritime power will limit the forces the US can spare for the Indian Ocean, nor is there any likelihood of additional capacity becoming available at least in the coming decade²⁴. Nor can any other powers contribute significantly to balancing China in the Indian Ocean. The best India can hope for is assistance to bridge the technological asymmetry between its forces and those of China; this is presently being negotiated. Considering that Quad partners do not address India's primary regional concerns, there is no reason to expect that India will give up its Indian Ocean priority and dissipate its limited capacity in joining them in the Western Pacific.

The Southeast Asian Void

The big regional void is Southeast Asia. The East Asia Summit and other ASEAN centric mechanisms have visibly failed in checking China's creeping hegemony. Regional nations have effectively fallen into economic dependency on China and avoid antagonising it. At the same time, they lack the military heft or political unity to counter China's growing assertion. Deep suspicion of great power motivations and China's continuing economic

²² Text of PM's Remarks on the Commissioning of Coast Ship Barracuda, March 12, 2015, <u>http://www.pib.gov.in/newsite/erelcontent.aspx?relid=116881</u>

²³ CNO Speaks at the Heritage Foundation, August 25, 2022, <u>https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/Press-Briefings/display-pressbriefing/Article/3161602/cno-speaks-at-the-heritage-foundation/</u>

²⁴ CRS Report RL 32665, Navy Force Structure and Shipbuilding Plans: Background and Issues for Congress, April 19, 2023, <u>https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL32665</u>



attraction are juxtaposed with concerns about loss of 'centrality' and worry that great power confrontation will make their region the battleground, with consequential destruction. Countering China's rising influence must therefore be one of the priority tasks of the Quad. While doing this, the belief that "mechanisms like Quad or Trilaterals should be seen visibly as supportive of ASEAN objectives"²⁵ will continue to guide India's thinking.

Thus two different strategic approaches are at play. One is confrontational, emphasising the military tool and seeking to drive home continued US primacy. It includes Freedom of Navigation operations that proclaim the US right to sail anywhere that international law allows; Taiwan Strait transits that show up China's inability to back up its assertions, frequent exercises in the region, and building up military infrastructure, as for example in the Philippines. It also includes the AUKUS military alliance and expanded US facilities in Australia. It puts the economic aspect in the back seat: US withdrawal from the TPP left the region's market access concerns unaddressed, allowing China to harness and dominate RCEP. The US may have invested over \$ 950 billion in the Asia-Pacific²⁶, but the vast majority of this is in Japan, Australia, China, South Korea and Singapore, leaving little for Southeast Asian countries. The promises made by President Biden at last year's US-ASEAN Summit²⁷ hide the fact that the US has for long neglected the region.

The other approach is providing Southeast Asia public goods and strengthening its ability to resist coercion. This is the approach adopted by the Quad. In supporting this approach, India has stepped up its regional engagement, not only participating actively in ASEAN-led activities, but also repeatedly iterating and demonstrating its respect for ASEAN centrality. India did not join the RCEP, but trade with the region has expanded. Renegotiation of the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement will hopefully result in further expansion of two-way trade. On the security front, the number of days spent by Indian Naval ships in Southeast Asia in the region has multiplied at least five-fold over the last 7-8 years.

In Southeast Asian perceptions, the biggest challenges facing the region are unemployment and recession, climate change and extreme weather events,

²⁵ S. Jaishankar, "The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World",

²⁶ Direct Investment by Country and Industry, 2021, accessed June 9, 2023, <u>https://www.bea.gov/news/2022/direct-investment-country-and-industry-2021</u>. Investment statistics for 2022 are expected to become available in July 2023.

²⁷ FACT Sheet: President Biden and AEAN Leaders Launch the US-ASEAN Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, <u>https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-</u> releases/2022/11/12/fact-sheet-president-biden-and-asean-leaders-launch-the-u-s-aseancomprehensive-strategic-partnership/

increasing great power military tensions in the region, and widening socioeconomic disparities. The Quad must focus on these areas if it is enhance its influence in this critical region.

It is in the above context that the divergent perceptions regarding the Quad must be addressed.

Is the Quad a Talking Shop? Does it Deliver?

The Quad has never been a talking shop; it has had strategic purpose even as a security dialogue among senior officials exchanging and coordinating positions on regional balance and stability. Using military alliance metrics to evaluate the Quad is simply misplaced, as are suggestions that it should move towards a collective security arrangement. The Quad already has an underlying maritime security component that continues to make progress.

The recent Quad summit's outcomes have been addressed in another brief²⁸. They include a Quad Vision Statement²⁹ that recognises the importance of existing regional institutions (ASEAN, PIF and IORA) and pledges to work alongside them to achieve shared objectives. This enhances the Quad's regional appeal.

In the little over two years that have elapsed since the first Quad Virtual Summit, the number of areas of Quad cooperation has expanded substantially. In the maritime space, the Quad has operationalised guidelines for its HADR partnership in the Indo-Pacific. Two pilot projects to implement the Indo-Pacific domain awareness initiative (IPMDA) in the Pacific and South East Asia have been launched; a third is awaiting launch in the Indian Ocean. The Quad will continue to derive benefits from the multi-level military exercises and bilateral inter-operability arrangements between its members.

Is the Quad an Anti-China Alliance?

Is the Quad an anti-China alliance? Three of its members are allies who have identified China as their priority security concern. "From the economic coercion of Australia to the conflict along the Line of Actual Control with India to the growing pressure on Taiwan and bullying of neighbours in the East and

²⁸ HK Singh, "India, the US and Progress of the Quad", DPG Policy Brief Volume VIII, Issue 18, <u>https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/publication/policy-briefs/india-the-us-and-progress-of-the-quad.html</u>

²⁹ Quad Leaders' Vision Statement – Enduring Partners for the Indo-Pacific, May 20, 2023, <u>https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/20/quad-leaders-vision-statement-enduring-partners-for-the-indo-pacific/</u>



South China Seas, our allies and partners in the region bear much of the cost of the PRC's harmful behaviour", says the US Indo-Pacific Strategy³⁰. "China's military build-up is now the largest and most ambitious of any country since the end of the Second World War", notes the recent Australian Defence Strategic Review, adding "This build-up is occurring without transparency or reassurance to the Indo-Pacific region of China's strategic intent"³¹. "China's current external stance, military activities, and other activities have become a matter for serious concern for Japan and the international community, and present an unprecedented and the greatest strategic challenge in ensuring the peace and security of Japan", states the Japanese National Security Strategy³². India hasn't published a national security or defence strategy, but the three-year old border standoff and shift of its Army's focus to the north speaks for itself.

For the weaker partner, an alliance provides a (questionable) assurance of collective defence in case it is attacked by a stronger adversary. For the stronger partner, it provides a forward position from where it can mount a strike on its adversary. Neither purpose is politically acceptable in India. An alliance with the US was not considered even following the 1962 India-China conflict. It is hardly likely to be acceptable now. China may peddle the alliance line: the Quad does after all counter China's hegemonic objectives. But there is no Quad Treaty and no mutual defence commitments as in Article 5 of the NATO Treaty³³, or Article IV of the US-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty³⁴. The Quad is not anti-China: it is only against the approach currently being pursued by the CCP to achieve regional dominance through military assertion and economic coercion.

Is there sufficient convergence between the partners to transform the Quad into an Asian NATO at some future date? There is no expectation that the Quad will act collectively in the event India's territorial security is challenged. Nor is there any binding agreement to collectively respond to territorial challenges in Southeast Asia, or any indication that Southeast Asia will accept such an

³⁰ Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States, February 2022,

 <u>https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf</u>
 ³¹ Defence Strategic Review, April 2023, <u>https://www.defence.gov.au/about/reviews-</u> inguiries/defence-strategic-review

 ³² National Security Strategy of Japan, December 2022, https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryou/221216anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf

³³ The North Atlantic Treaty (1949), retrieved on June 10, 2023, <u>https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/stock_publications/20120822_nato_trea_ty_en_light_2009.pdf</u>

³⁴ Mutual Defense Treaty between the Republic of the Philippines and the United States of America, August 30, 1951, <u>https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1951/08/30/mutual-defensetreaty-between-the-republic-of-the-philippines-and-the-united-states-of-americaaugust-30-1951/</u>



agreement. Unless China dramatically transforms its regional approach through military aggression, there is little likelihood of the Quad transforming into an Asian NATO.

Is India the Quad's Weak Link?

Is India the weak link in the Quad³⁵? This question is asked by those who see the Quad from a China-centric perspective and cannot look beyond maintaining US primacy, deterrence, coercion and containment in dealing with the challenge. A recent article titled "America's Bad Bet on India" addresses this mindset³⁶. Why India should provide military support in dealing with, say, a Taiwan contingency when it doesn't expect the Quad partners to reciprocate in similar contingencies that impact India's security, is left unanswered.

The reality is that India has stood off China's military coercion for three years in Ladakh and continues to do so. It has maintained a 24X7 presence at eight critical nodes in the Indian Ocean for a similar period. It has stepped up its activities in the Western Pacific manifold, exercising with partner nations as well as with ASEAN countries, including the US, far more often than it has ever done. It also exercises with others in the Indian Ocean: the maiden India-France-UAE trilateral exercise this month, the maiden India-ASEAN maritime exercise last month, and exercises with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman, Qatar, France and the UK in the Indian Ocean speak for themselves.

Furthermore, the Quad is about the Indo-Pacific which includes the Indian Ocean, it is not just about the Asia-Pacific. There is no Indo-Pacific without India. The Quad is not just about China, it is about providing public goods and thus developing an Indo-Pacific environment that is more conducive to its vision. The US leadership appears to have understood, even if its think tank community has not, that despite not being a treaty ally, India is in fact America's best bet in the Indo-Pacific³⁷.

Do India-Russia Relations Impact the Quad?

The US admittedly has an interest in sundering India's relationship with Russia, particularly the military element. This interest, however, does not extend to

³⁵ See for example Derek Grossman, "India is the Weakest Link in the Quad", <u>https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/07/23/india-is-the-weakest-link-in-the-quad/</u>, Chet Lee, "India: The Quad's Weakest Link", <u>https://thediplomat.com/2021/10/india-the-quads-weakest-link/</u>

³⁶ Ashley J Tellis, "America's Bad Bet on India", May 1, 2021, <u>https://www.foreignaffairs.com/india/americas-bad-bet-india-modi</u>

³⁷ Arzan Tarapore, "America's Best Bet in the Indo-Pacific", May 29, 2023, <u>https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/americas-best-bet-indo-pacific</u>



modifying its own export restrictions to provide the technology India seeks and is willing to pay for. Russia, on the other hand, supplies technology that the US is either unwilling or unable to provide, such as nuclear attack submarines and the S-400 air-defence system, that too without the risk of post-sale sanctions impeding their future usage. Russian equipment comes at prices that are more affordable than those of comparable Western origin systems, a significant factor for a developing nation that is still financially constrained. Their technological inferiority is an oft-propagated myth: India has effectively used so-called inferior technology to defeat supposedly superior Western equipment with Pakistan in 1965 and 1971 and is confident of being able to do so again.

India will continue to source military equipment that fulfils its security requirements at a competitive price. The Quad's focal area is the Indo-Pacific, where the Russia factor has a minor role. Its purpose is not military. The benefits of forcing India to choose between Russian and US equipment would appear to be not commensurate with the risk of losing Indian cooperation. This seems to have been understood by the US administration and should not become a factor in the Quad's future development. The absence of mention of Russia in the Quad Joint Statement speaks for itself.

Strengthening the Quad's Military Agenda

Is it time to strengthen the Quad's military agenda, as has been recommended by some³⁸? The answer depends on whether doing so will add to deterrence in China's perceptions, and how regional nations will perceive this development. There can be no definitive answer to the former question, particularly as China already sees the Quad as an anti-China alliance. It sees that building blocks for region-wide domain awareness are coming into place through the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness Initiative. The access and logistics cooperation agreements required to enable Quad partners to sustain a presence through the Indo-Pacific are already in place, albeit at the bilateral level. Participation by all four nations in exercises like Balikatan, Super Garuda Shield, Talisman Sabre and Malabar lay the grounds for interoperability. Adopting a declaratory military agenda will only enable substantiation of China's portrayal of the Quad as an Asian NATO without yielding additional deterrence benefits.

³⁸ See for example Justin Bassi, "Time for the Quad to bare its teeth on regional security", May 15, 2023, <u>https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/time-for-the-quad-to-bare-its-teeth-on-regional-security/</u>



More important is how the action will be perceived by Southeast Asia. Indonesia's President recently described the Quad as a partner, while highlighting that ASEAN did not want any conflict³⁹. Adopting a stronger military agenda risks this hard-won acceptance without conferring any significant benefit and is thus avoidable for the present. In any case nothing prevents Quad nations from strengthening their bilateral, trilateral and even quadrilateral linkages to enable a quick shift to military cooperation should they feel the need.

Institutionalising and Expanding the Quad

Should the Quad be institutionalised? Should it be offered a permanent secretariat, for example in Port Blair, as has been suggested⁴⁰? For all the progress that has been made, the Quad is still an informal partnership finding its way ahead. These questions are perhaps better addressed once there is confidence that the Quad is here to stay and will continue to retain the full support of partners in times to come. And Port Blair in any case is a complete non-starter for what is essentially a diplomatic security dialogue.

Should the Quad be expanded? The first Quad Virtual Summit brought together four Indo-Pacific partners with substantial human, industrial, military, technological and diplomatic strengths. It spoke of diverse perspectives united in a shared vision of the free and open Indo-Pacific⁴¹. The first in-person summit described the Quad as a force for regional peace, stability, security and prosperity (but not deterrence)⁴². Optimally, any new partner nation should be an Indo-Pacific middle power sharing the same objectives and possessing the human, industrial, military or technological strengths to independently contribute towards Quad objectives while adding to diversity of opinion. It

⁴⁰ Arun Prakash, "Time has come for an Indo-Pacific Concord of regional democracies with a maritime security charter", October 24, 2020, <u>https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/quad-malabar-navy-exercise-chinaindia-6854350/</u> and "The Maritime 'Great Game': Why Delhi needs to bolster the Andaman and Nicobar Command", May 26, 2023, <u>https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-maritime-great-game-why-delhineeds-to-bolster-the-andaman-and-nicobar-command-8629277/</u>

³⁹ "Jokowi: Aim is to make ASEAN region stable", May 8, 2023, <u>https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2023/05/906846/exclusive-jokowi-aim-make-asean-region-stable-nsttv</u>

⁴¹ Quad Leaders' Joint Statement: "The Spirit of the Quad", March 12, 2021, <u>https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/12/quad-leaders-joint-statement-the-spirit-of-the-quad/</u>

⁴² Joint Statement from Quad Leaders, September 24, 2021, <u>https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/12/quad-leaders-joint-statement-the-spirit-of-the-quad/</u>

should not be one more US ally. Only Indonesia partially fits this bill, but for its own comfort level in emphasising ASEAN-led architecture.

Moreover, adding members would only increase coordination difficulties without yielding commensurate benefit. There is no gain in adding to Quad members at present. Nothing, however, prevents the Quad from reaching out to ASEAN, IORA or PIF for specific initiatives as required.

Looking Ahead

The Quad is still a relatively new partnership, gathering strength and finding regional acceptability as it goes along. Prospects for its future depend on the development of the India-US relationship, particularly in addressing India's major security concerns. They depend on delivery of the Quad's already ambitious agenda and demonstration to the region that democracies can deliver, particularly in the international arena. They depend on the ability to convince regional nations of the Quad's stated intent to take regional fora, such as ASEAN-centric mechanisms, the Indian Ocean Rim Association and the Pacific Islands Forum along. They depend on imaginative leadership, and it will be India's turn to provide that as the Quad moves towards the 2024 summit in India. To some extent, they may depend on management of the alliancefixated US-primacy lobby and denying it the ability to derail expanding cooperation.

Conclusion

The first incarnation of the Quad collapsed because it was given a far more expansive character than was intended, leading to China's protest. History could repeat itself, in that giving the Quad a character that is not intended could spook the critical Southeast Asian region into withdrawing their acceptance. Such an outcome must be guarded against.

The destructive power of modern weapons has made dependence on military means to shape the regional environment a dangerous prospect. This is particularly true for great powers. Prudence dictates that diplomacy must lead, the approach that the Quad has adopted. It has made substantial headway in the short period it has been in existence. It's efficacy at delivery of public goods will determine the its acceptability, both for regional nations caught in the vortex of great power competition, as well as for partner nations striving to keep the Indo-Pacific open and free.

The Quad does not replace hard power measures. If anything, it complements them, seeking to show that a concert of maritime democracies can provide the



public goods that the Indo-Pacific needs and China's model need not be the only viable one. Hard power measures such as the AUKUS and other alliances in the Asia-Pacific can continue in parallel. There is no benefit, however, in merging both into one military-dominant track: that may in fact precipitate the conflict it is in the interests of the region to avoid.



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