



**Delhi Policy Group**

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



# POLICY BRIEF

## India, the US and Progress of the Quad

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Volume VIII, Issue 18

June 10, 2023



**Delhi Policy Group**

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[www.delhipolicygroup.org](http://www.delhipolicygroup.org)



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## Cover Photographs:

*Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese of Australia, Prime Minister Kishida Fumio of Japan, and President Joseph Biden of the United States, for the 2023 Quad Leaders' Summit in Hiroshima on May 20, 2023.*

*(Source: [President Biden/Official Twitter](#))*

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## India, the US and Progress of the Quad\*

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### Global Scene

There is unprecedented disarray in global order. Strategic competition for primacy and dominance is a mainstay of global geopolitics. What is different today is that great powers have shed most constraints to their behaviour as they resort to military aggression, unilateral assertions and economic coercion. They also demand that the “Rest” of the world must align with their self-serving interests.

The US remains the world’s pre-eminent power and has long anchored global order, but its fractured politics signal growing strategic unpredictability.

### Asia’s Strategic Realities

By civilisation and history, Asia is distinct, as are its strategic realities. There is no Asian Union, no Asian Alliance, and no notion of shared sovereignty. Asia today comprises several rising and strategically independent powers, and is increasingly multipolar.

There is broad consensus across post-colonial Asia that invocations of rules-based order, sovereignty and political independence of nations must apply universally, not selectively. In short, there must be no double standards.

The IMF projects that Asia will this year contribute 67.4% of aggregate global GDP growth. The secular shift of relative power from the Euro-Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific is continuing apace.<sup>1</sup>

The main source of US power and influence resides in the Euro-Atlantic. US preeminence is under major challenge in the Indo-Pacific, where US capacity to leverage power is more limited than in Europe. The US lacks the capability

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\*This Policy Brief is based in part on remarks made by the author to the Advisory Board meeting of the RAND Center for Asia Pacific Policy on June 8, 2023.

<sup>1</sup> The IMF forecasts that in Asia, China will contribute 34.9% to aggregate global GDP growth, India 15.4%, Indonesia 4.4%, Bangladesh 1.8%, Japan 1.8%, Vietnam 1.7%, Malaysia 1.1%, and Thailand 1.1%. In contrast, the Western Hemisphere will contribute 13.7%, the Middle East 7.8%, Europe 7.1% and Africa 4%.



to constrain both Russia and China at the same time. Efforts to seek a thaw in US-China relations are making little headway.

In the Indo-Pacific, the US focus is mainly on East Asia, where it has shored up alliances and initiated steps to strengthen its military posture. The US is absent on the Eurasian heartland, has lost ground in West Asia, and is only marginally present in the Indian Ocean.

China is the main beneficiary of the current disorder, and is steadily expanding its strategic space and influence. China's strategic initiatives (BRI, GDI, GSI, GCI) are designed to change the status quo incrementally, through grey zone coercion and creation of economic dependencies, to establish its primacy. Its claims to being a benign actor lack credibility.

As great power competition rises in East Asia, the danger of miscalculation is growing. Regional states want to ensure that Asia's future is not set back by conflict. China's behaviour holds the key. The pushback against its assertions is growing.

The destiny of Asia is not a central issue for Europe. The conflict in Europe is not a defining issue for Asia, as some contend.

The future of world order will be determined in the Indo-Pacific, depending on how the increasingly all-pervasive competition between the US and China plays out.

## **India's Regional Role**

India is a civilisational state, rooted in Asia. Its identity and values derive from its civilisational heritage, which is universalist. It seeks an equitable, inclusive and cooperative world order, free from domination. Hence India's steadfast commitment to strategic independence. Any expectation that India will act contrary to its own interests to align with the interests of other powers, or their primacy, is misplaced.

India's primary concern is with authoritarian expansionism and coercion in Asia. Enhancing national capacity to deter aggression in the continental and maritime space, working to mitigate regional challenges with strategic partners, including in the Quad, and contributing to a free and open Indo-Pacific, are among India's foremost priorities.

The genesis of the Indo-Pacific lies in the late Japanese PM Shinzo Abe's recognition in 2007 of India's centrality to the region's strategic balance. Successive US administrations have since recognised this reality.

Without India's counterbalancing strength, for instance, South East Asia will be overwhelmed and encircled by China's power as it expands from the South China Sea into the Indian Ocean.

India's regional initiatives – SAGAR, IPOI (ASEAN-linked) and IOIP (IORA-linked)<sup>2</sup> – are designed to develop inclusive partnerships among equal stakeholders, and contribute meaningfully to regional architecture. They promote cooperative endeavours to make the oceanic space more secure and stable, enhance connectivity and economic cooperation, and develop regional capacities to deal with non-traditional security challenges. In normative terms, they promote adherence to international law, including UNCLOS. In the Indian Ocean region and beyond, India is frequently the first responder to humanitarian crises.

## India and the US

The US is an indispensable strategic partner for India across the multiple domains of diplomacy, economy, education, technology, defence and security, and people-to-people ties.

India is not a US treaty ally. It advances shared interests as a partner; it does not defend US interests as an ally. It works closely with the US wherever their concerns and interests align, as they certainly do in the Indo-Pacific (and more recently in West Asia).

Neither the US nor India have a better option than each other in the Indo-Pacific. There is commonality of interest in countering China's expansionist power. US concern is with this power pushing East. India's concern is with this power flowing South and West into the Indian Ocean. The US-India partnership must address both concerns.

India does not expect the US to defend it, but does ask that the US must not undermine India's security, and should strengthen its economic rise and deterrent capability as a strategic partner.

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<sup>2</sup> Indo-Pacific Ocean's Initiative (IPOI), IORA's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (IOIP).



## Understanding the Quad

Conceived in 2004 following the Asian tsunami, initiated in 2007, retired in 2008, and revived in 2017 amidst vastly changed strategic circumstances, the Quad presents an interesting case study of the role of interests-based minilateral diplomacy – and its success.

The Quad is not part of US regional military strategy, or its hard security objectives, or about US primacy in the Asia Pacific. Any metric that assesses the Quad purely on its impact on military balance is misplaced. The Quad's purpose is shaping a favourable geopolitical and geoeconomic balance in the region.

### What is the Quad all about?

- It has no formal structure or treaty obligations, and yet has a substantive agenda to support a stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific.
- It comprises three partners who are allied with each other under US leadership, and one which is unaligned but capable and like-minded.
- Each member has distinct regional priorities and national concerns, but there is convergence of interest on maintaining a stable Indo-Pacific balance and opposing destabilising or unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo by force.
- It advocates an open, inclusive and rules-based order and freedom of the global commons, which are essential for peace and prosperity.
- It seeks to deliver practical benefits in the areas of health, technology, digital connectivity, infrastructure, climate change, economic resilience and maritime security, providing alternatives to China across the board.
- It functions in full transparency and in the spirit of partnership with regional states and institutions.
- It has the capacity to meet strategic challenges through a strong underlying construct of regional architecture based on bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral engagements.
- It is an instrument of dissuasion, with the latent possibility of deterrence. (Naval exercise Malabar).

- It is principally centred around diplomatic coordination and security dialogues, not on aggregating military power.
- It is unlikely to pursue a more concrete security agenda for the present, and will not be a military alliance.
- Its members are the four most capable maritime democracies of the Indo-Pacific with shared concerns about authoritarian challenges in the region and the heft to moderate malign actions.

Without India, there is no Indo-Pacific, only the Asia Pacific. Leveraging India's strengths in constructing a stable Indo-Pacific balance is essential for the Quad.

Recent progress of the Quad has been US-led, but the US and India are both key factors. The Quad is a test of their relations as partners, not allies, thus bringing them closer. The Quad also plays a role in the continuing enhancement of India's relations with Japan and Australia.

Regional receptivity towards the Quad has made good progress, led principally by Indonesia.

Russia and China remain unremittingly hostile to both the Quad and the Indo-Pacific construct, decrying "small cliques" and "bloc confrontation".

### Third Quad Summit Outcomes

Holding a brief summit on the sidelines of the G7 meeting in Hiroshima on May 20, 2023 was a setback in terms of optics, but the substantive outcomes remained unchanged, and marked significant progress.

The Quad has for the first time defined the parameters of a common vision, which has considerable commonality with other regional visions – AOIP of ASEAN, IOIP of IORA and the PIF's 2050 vision.<sup>3</sup> All seek a stable and secure region that provides the foundations for economic development and prosperity, and respect for international law.

Remarks by three leaders at the Quad summit were largely complementary, with the Japanese PM being the outlier.

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<sup>3</sup> Indian Ocean Regional Association (IORA), Pacific Islands Forum (PIF).





- PM Albanese spoke of a regional balance in the Indo-Pacific that keeps peace so all countries can benefit.
- PM Modi highlighted the importance of the Indo-Pacific region as a global economic engine and saw the Quad as a platform for peace, stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific.
- President Biden stressed the capacity of democracies to deliver and the importance of the Indo-Pacific in determining the future of the world.
- PM Kishida on his part focused on Russia's outrage in Europe, but made no mention of authoritarian expansionism in Asia. [Japan's focus has drifted from the free and open Indo-Pacific to a free and open international community.]

Taken together, the Quad Vision Statement and Joint Statement provide greater structure to its objectives and better define their scope.

The new element in the Quad Vision Statement for the Indo-Pacific region is respect for the role of regional institutions (ASEAN, PIF, IORA) and a desire to complement their efforts to advance shared interests. There is also a new Quad commitment to "maintain stability where competition is managed responsibly under international law". This implies that the Quad will not seek to escalate regional tensions.

The Quad Joint Statement enunciates a key objective: an Indo-Pacific region where "no country dominates and no country is dominated – and all are free from coercion and can determine their futures." This is broadly aligned with India's desire to seek a more balanced and increasingly multipolar Indo-Pacific that can resist attempts to impose regional dominance, from within and without.

In recognition of India's interests, the Joint Statement commits the Quad to strengthen cooperation in the Indian Ocean region, and supports IORA's role as the premier forum for addressing the region's challenges. The future expansion of IPMDA<sup>4</sup> coverage to partners in the Indian Ocean in the coming months is also endorsed.

That said, references in the Joint Statement to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific maritime domain remain focused only on East Asia. To be mutually

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<sup>4</sup> Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness Initiative (IPMDA)



reinforcing, the threat mitigation strategies of the Quad partners still need to be better aligned. That remains a work in progress.

The Quad Joint Statement's paragraph on Ukraine almost entirely reflects India's position, and could not have been more different than the expansive statement on Ukraine issued at the G7 Summit. Its essential element is: "Conscious that ours must not be an era of war, we remain committed to dialogue and diplomacy."

Significantly, neither Russia nor China find mention in the Joint Statement.

## Security Issues

Several of the Quad's objectives straddle both non-traditional and traditional security: HA/DR, IPMDA (illicit activities, IUU fishing, climate and humanitarian events), Cyber Security, Space (sustainable use of outer space and space situational awareness) and Counter-terrorism.

Taken together, these elements can make a significant contribution towards enhancing regional security. Going beyond that towards a collective maritime security agenda is not on the cards.

## Conclusion

The Quad is making headway. It is expanding its outreach to existing regional institutions, and broadening its ambit to include the Indian Ocean. Its agenda covers regional public goods, elements of net security provision, and respect for rules-based order. Receptivity towards the Quad as a positive factor of reassurance is growing. The Quad's strategic signalling and soft security approach is likely to find greater traction in South East Asia than military alliance posturing, which has been on full display at the recent Shangri-La Dialogue held in Singapore.

PM Modi has long contended that the Quad is a factor of regional and global good, and that its time has come. He will now have the opportunity to take the Quad forward when he hosts he next Quad Summit in 2024.

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