

DPG POLICY REPORT

Global Realignments, the Tokyo Quad Summit and India

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Cover Photographs:

The Four Quad Leaders (left to right) – Australian PM Anthony Albanese, US President Joseph Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, and Indian PM Narendra Modi at the outset of the Second In-Person Quad Leaders' Meeting at Kantei, Tokyo, May 24, 2022. Source: Kantei's Official Website

The Second In-Person Quad Leaders' Meeting in progress at Kantei, Tokyo, May 24, 2022. Source: Kantei's Official Website

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I. The Evolving Global Order

With the Russia-Ukraine conflict at the centre of global attention, the reality that the Indo-Pacific has become the mainstay of global geopolitical competition and geo-economic power has receded from the limelight. It is here that the world's two leading powers, the United States and China, are engaged in direct competition to establish their regional and global dominance.

The systemic disruption in world order caused by the ongoing Ukraine conflict is resulting in a major realignment of geopolitical forces. Two distinct blocs are emerging: one being the US led bloc comprising the US and its European and Asian allies and partners, the other an Asia-Eurasia centric grouping comprising China and Russia, largely dominating the continental land mass while also seeking to gain control over critical sea lines connecting it to Asia, the Middle East and East Africa. Both blocs are engaged in consolidating their geo-strategic space and security interests.

The US, recognising China as its core competitor, is attempting to marshal allies and partners as its "single greatest asymmetric strength" to create security-based architectures in the Indo-Pacific in support of its Indo-Pacific Strategy of 2021.¹ Asian allies of the US, such as Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan have joined the Euro-Atlantic powers in imposing economic sanctions on Russia; in turn, their EU counterparts have welcomed US-led Indo-Pacific strategies that support a democratic, rules based, and Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP).² Creation of AUKUS is an attempt to create an anglophile military alliance in the East Asia-Western Pacific theatre to contain Chinese assertions in the region and strengthen their first tier of hard power defences along the First Island Chain. Further, to create a common alliance system, the US invited its Asian allies to the NATO summit in Madrid on June

¹The White House. (2021). Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States. Washington DC: The White House., page 12.

²The White House. (2022). <u>Japan-U.S. Joint Leaders' Statement: Strengthening the Free and</u> <u>Open International Order</u>, 23 May 2022. Retrieved 5 July 2022; The White House. (2022). <u>Quad Joint Leaders' Statement</u>, 24 May 2022. Retrieved 5 July 2022.



29-30, 2022.³ This highlights that the US seeks to create a broad-based consensus within both trans-Atlantic and Asian allies against the twin challenge from Russia and China.

On the other hand, the Sino-Russian partnership is arrayed across military, diplomatic, economic, and technological domains. The entente between Beijing and Moscow is driven by opposition to the West's attempts to shape the global narrative and maintain its unipolarity. This 'no limits'⁴ strategic partnership, remains steadfast and has only been reinforced. This is clearly discernible through expanding bilateral trade in key areas,⁵ continuing joint military exercises⁶ and growing energy ties.⁷ North Korea, Iran, Pakistan and Taliban-occupied Afghanistan coalesce peripherally around the Sino-Russian axis. With three established and two threshold nuclear powers in this bloc, questions of strategic deterrence loom large in Indo–Pacific security equations.

Amidst current US overcommitment on the Ukraine front, the American leadership is cognisant that "China along with its allies and partners is the only country with comprehensive power potential backed by the intent to reshape the Asian and international order".⁸ For this reason, the US strives to remain focused on what Secretary Blinken calls "the most serious long-term challenge to the international order".⁹

In the backdrop of these alignments and realignments of global forces, the Quad Leaders met in Tokyo on May 24, 2022, to reaffirm their Indo-Pacific

³US Department of State. (2022). <u>The Administration's Approach to the People's Republic of</u> <u>China</u> - United States Department of State, 26 May 2022. Retrieved 5 July 2022.

⁴Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China. (2022). <u>President Xi Jinping Held Talks</u> <u>with Russian President Vladimir Putin</u>, 4 February 2022.

⁵Ezrati, M. (2022). Trade Is Surging Between China And Russia. Retrieved 5 July 2022, from https://www.forbes.com/sites/miltonezrati/2022/04/18/trade-is-surging-between-china-and-russia/?sh=4f4eef803ae1

⁶ANI. (2022). <u>Russia, China conduct military exercises off Taiwan</u>, 25 May 2022. Retrieved 5 July 2022.

⁷Yeping, Y. (2022). China, Russia sign new trade agreement on energy and food, expected to further unleash potential - Global Times. Retrieved 5 July 2022, from https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202206/1268392.shtml

⁸US Department of State. (2022). <u>The Administration's Approach to the People's Republic of</u> <u>China</u>.

⁹ Ibid.



commitments. The meeting was the high point of US President Joe Biden's five-day Asia tour, which also marked his first Presidential visit to the region.¹⁰



The Four Quad Leaders (left to right) – Australian PM Anthony Albanese, US President Joseph Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, and Indian PM Narendra Modi at the outset of the Second In-Person Quad Leaders' Meeting at Kantei, Tokyo, May 24, 2022. Source: Kantei's Official Website

II. The Third Quad Leaders' Summit

The Joint Statement of the summit reaffirmed the intention of the Leaders to project the Quad as a force for global good through "a positive and practical agenda",¹¹ and their commitment "to deliver on this promise".¹²While the Leaders took stock of the progress made by working groups on vaccine partnership, climate action, emerging technologies, infrastructure, space and cybersecurity, the Summit also saw new announcements, notably the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) and the launch of the Quad Fellowship. An economic dimension to the Quad is taking shape, as all four countries will be joining the US-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). Thus, the Tokyo Quad Summit was a significant step toward

¹⁰ Reuters (2022). <u>Biden in Asia: South Korea, Japan schedule and to-do list</u>. Retrieved 5 July 2022.

¹¹The White House. (2022). <u>Quad Joint Leaders' Statement</u>, 24 May 2022.

¹² Ibid.



consolidating the grouping through a calibrated security and economic agenda.

The Leaders maintained their commitment to the basic principles underlying the free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific, i.e., the rule of law, freedom of navigation, peaceful resolution of disputes, sovereignty and territorial integrity. They accommodated India's position on the Ukraine crisis by not condemning Russia directly. In a departure from previous statements, concerns about the Pacific Islands' security and regional cooperation preceded references to broad convergence on global security issues, namely, territorial assertions in the East and South China Seas, denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula, the military coup in Myanmar, and cross-border terrorism and violent extremism.

On the COVID-19 pandemic response, the Quad partners declared the successful delivery of 670 million vaccine doses, including at least 265 million doses in the Indo-Pacific region. The grouping committed to providing a billion doses by the end of 2022, meeting the promise made during the First Quad Summit held last year. They also pledged \$524 million to the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) to develop new vaccines and research on emerging pathogens and their pandemic potential.

On the infrastructure front, the Quad announced an ambitious investment vision of \$50 billion in the Indo-Pacific for the next five years. It also decided to strengthen the capacity of regional states to cope with debt management and sustainability through various bilateral and multilateral mechanisms, including the Quad Debt Management Resource Portal. On the climate front, the Quad Climate Change Adaption and Mitigation Package was launched to advance the progress of the Climate Working Group. It will deal with issues like green shipping, clean hydrogen, secure energy supply chains and disaster-risk reduction.

On critical and emerging technologies, the Quad countries decided to undertake the mapping of their respective semiconductor supply chain strengths and vulnerabilities. They launched the Common Statement of Principles on Critical Technology Supply Chains to advance their cooperation on semiconductors and other critical technologies, including 5G supplier diversification. In the cybersecurity domain, the Quad decided to progress greater coordination on information sharing, mapping supply chains of digital products and services, as well as setting baseline software security standards among the partners.

One of the major highlights of the Third Quad Leaders' summit was the launch of the IPMDA Partnership to offer a "near-real-time, integrated and cost-



effective maritime domain awareness picture".¹³ According to the Fact Sheet issued by The White House, the IPMDA "will allow tracking of 'dark shipping' and other tactical-level activities, such as rendezvous at sea, as well as improve partners' ability to respond to climate and humanitarian events and to protect their fisheries, which are vital to many Indo-Pacific economies."¹⁴ The initiative envisages the linking of existing regional information fusion centres in the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia and Pacific Islands, which are based in India, Singapore and Vanuatu respectively as well as at the Pacific Islands Fisheries Agency based in the Solomon Islands. As the IPMDA progresses, the Quad will seek to cooperate in promising maritime technologies to attain cutting-edge capabilities.

Other areas of cooperation included space, where the partners will share spacebased earth observation data through the Quad Satellite Data Portal with an objective to address challenges such as climate change, disaster preparedness and monitoring ocean resources. The Tokyo Leaders' Summit also saw the launch of the Quad Fellowship, under which 100 students from the four countries will get scholarships to study STEM subjects in US universities.

Apart from the Quad summit, the launch of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) was perhaps the most anticipated economic initiative of President Biden's Asia tour. Thirteen countries, comprising 40% of the global GDP – four Quad partners (US, Japan, India, Australia), seven ASEAN members (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam), South Korea, New Zealand, and lately Fiji have joined the initiative. The US-led IPEF is seen as a critical strategy to engage with regional partners with two broad objectives – first, to re-establish US economic presence in the Indo-Pacific especially after withdrawal from TPP; and second, to blunt the economic influence of China-led mechanisms like BRI and RCEP. It will involve "collective discussions toward future negotiations" on four pillars – trade; supply chains; clean-energy, decarbonisation and infrastructure; and, tax and anti-corruption.¹⁵ The specifics of the framework will be decided in due course through negotiations among the signatory countries.

¹³The White House. (2022). <u>FACT SHEET: Quad Leaders' Tokyo Summit 2022</u>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ The White House (2022). <u>Statement on Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity</u>.



III. The Quad, China and the US

The China Factor

China has always seen the Quad as an antagonistic grouping – from Chinese FM Wang Yi dismissing it as "sea foam"¹⁶ in its early days, to Global Times calling it a "sinister gang of the Indo-Pacific"¹⁷ after the Leaders' Summit in Washington. After the Tokyo Summit, the CPC mouthpiece accused the Quad of "playing insidious tricks"¹⁸, i.e., the US has "sugar-coated"¹⁹ the Quad mechanism's initiatives to make it acceptable for regional countries, while the sole purpose remains to target China.

On the other hand, the Quad leadership maintains that the grouping has no security connotations, is not an Asian NATO, nor is it targeted against any particular country. This position is underscored by the Quad staying clear from a hard security dimension.

The Quad took cognisance of China's inroads in the Southern Pacific, especially after Beijing's controversial security pact with the Solomon Islands, which might allow the PLA Navy to maintain a naval presence under the pretext of assisting social order and internal security. Pacific Islands' security was given priority in joint statement, as mentioned earlier. The Quad partners committed to "address the needs of Pacific Islands partners"²⁰ and extended support for Pacific Regional Security Partners. Considering that the summit was held two days before Chinese FM Wang Yi's 10-day tour to Pacific Islands, a signalling game was clearly at play.

Second, the Quad acknowledged that "debt issues" related to infrastructure investments have been "exacerbated by the pandemic in many countries".²¹ While not naming China, the focus on debt-sustainability and transparency through capacity building of regional partners addressed the debt trap arising out of China's BRI investments and related hidden debts. China is the largest single-nation external public lender (with debts worth \$350 billion) with at least

¹⁶PTI. (2018). <u>'Quad' move will dissipate like sea foam: China - Times of India</u>., The Times of India. Retrieved 5 July 2022.

¹⁷Global Times. (2021). <u>Quad mechanism turning into 'sinister gang of Indo-Pacific'</u>: Global Times editorial - Global Times. Retrieved 5 July 2022.

¹⁸Global Times. (2022). <u>The Quad plays insidious tricks</u>: Global Times editorial - Global Times. Retrieved 5 July 2022.

¹⁹Global Times. (2022). <u>Quad mechanism sugarcoats statements to woo regional countries</u> - Global Times.

²⁰The White House. (2022). <u>Quad Joint Leaders' Statement</u>, 24 May 2022.

²¹ Ibid.



40 countries where debt to Chinese lenders is more than 10% of their GDPs.²² For instance, Sri Lanka is already in a sovereign debt crisis while Laos and Cambodia owe China debts exceeding 20% of GDP.²³ India presented Sri Lanka's case to Japan for humanitarian aid and bridge financing on the sidelines of the Summit.²⁴

Third, the IPMDA Partnership, while not overtly military in nature, strengthens the maritime security dimension to check China's illicit, coercive and grey zone activities in the region. The Quad partners will cooperate through commercially available technologies to provide near-real-time maritime domain awareness to monitor dark shipping and illegal fishing. China reportedly makes up for 95% of illegal fishing in the Indo-Pacific.²⁵ IPMDA will facilitate database creation of maritime activities in the region to alert regional states of trespassing by Chinese vessels in their territorial waters and EEZs . It also networks information fusion centres in the Indian Ocean and the Southern Pacific, regions where the PLA Navy's presence has been significant in recent years.

Fourth, the IPEF introduces a much-lacking US economic strategy in the Indo-Pacific, post its walkout from TPP. The US approach to the region had been largely military and security centric, neglecting the role of China's economic and supply chain predominance as part of Beijing's hegemonic aspirations. As China remains the leading trading partner for all nations in the region, even the closest US allies (Japan and Australia) are sceptical of complete economic decoupling from China despite its aggressive behaviour. For countries in Southeast Asia, the contradiction between the region being the backend of Chinese supply chains and security threats posed by China's assertions in the South China Sea has constrained their strategic choices. The launch of Indo-Pacific Economic Framework offers some limited potential of reorienting supply chains to wean countries away from their China dependency.

US Indo-Pacific Calculus

The process that began with President Obama's 'Pivot to Asia' has finally matured under the Biden Administration. The network of US alliances, AUKUS

²²Wang, K. (2022). <u>China: Is it burdening poor countries with unsustainable debt?</u>. Retrieved 5 July 2022.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴Srinivasan, M. (2022). <u>India, Japan to work together to help Sri Lanka during crisis</u>. Retrieved 5 July 2022.

²⁵Explained: <u>Quad's plan to check China's illegal fishing and the role India will play</u>. (2022). Retrieved 5 July 2022.



and the Quad, provides three pillars under which Washington can execute its Indo-Pacific strategy.

The Quad is central to America's multi-domain strategy to prevent the domination of the Indo – Pacific by another power. The presence of a strategically independent and democratic India provides a positive image to the grouping in South East Asia. This outlook was reflected in President Biden's remarks at the Tokyo Summit when he thanked PM Modi for his "continuing commitment" to the Quad and for "making sure democracies deliver because that's what this is about: democracies versus autocracies".²⁶

The Quad will not have a military dimension, and despite South Korea voicing its interest in joining the Quad, the expansion of the grouping is not immediately envisaged.²⁷ This helps to counter China's propaganda about a 'bloc mentality' among the four partners. On the other hand, discussions have been held on AUKUS's possible expansion to include Japan, and regularising military-level engagements among the US allies. In realist terms, the Quad is only the third element behind US alliances and AUKUS when it comes to promoting US interests in the Indo-Pacific.

As mentioned earlier, the US approach since the Ukraine crisis has been to consolidate its allies and partners around the globe through comprehensive engagement – military, economic, technological, and even ideological – with a view to preserve the West-dominated liberal international order. Biden's Asia tour was an extension of this vision. Through the combination of Quad, AUKUS and IPEF, the US has consolidated its approach to Indo-Pacific, i.e., contesting China on diplomatic, military, and economic fronts by involving both Asian and European allies.

Within this calculus, the US (and the West) does not subscribe to a multipolar world. Although the US would like allies and partners to shoulder regional responsibilities, it envisions an international order under US unipolarity. Such an order should subscribe to Western democratic values and be sustained by West-led institutions. A glimpse of this outlook can be seen in how the West is dealing with Russia.

²⁶The White House. (2022). <u>Remarks by President Biden, Prime Minister Kishida Fumio of</u> <u>Japan, Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, and Prime Minister Anthony Albanese of</u> <u>Australia at the Second In-Person Quad Leaders' Summit</u> | The White House. Retrieved 5 July 2022, from

²⁷Peri, D. (2022). <u>South Korea to examine joining Quad grouping.</u> The Hindu. Retrieved 5 July 2022.



IV. India and the Quad

As frequently stated by Prime Minister Modi, India sees the Quad as a force for global good, i.e., a grouping where it can collaborate with like-minded partners to pursue a positive agenda, provide regional public goods, and uphold a rules-based order for a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific. From a diplomatic perspective, the Quad is a fitting platform for New Delhi to endorse its democratic credentials without bandwagoning with the West.

India's interests lie not in the militarisation of the Quad like an "Asian NATO", but in seeing it as a soft balancing mechanism in the region. China's military challenge to India is fundamentally different from that perceived by its Quad partners. India faces a two-front challenge from China, both continental and maritime, in the Himalayas and the Indian Ocean, while the other three partners are focused on East Asia and the Southern Pacific. For India, the Quad plays a limited role in its military threat mitigation strategy.



The Second In-Person Quad Leaders' Meeting in progress at Kantei, Tokyo, May 24, 2022. Source: Kantei's Official Website

The Quad's utility for India lies mainly in the non-military dimensions of power: economic, technological and diplomatic. India has a direct interest in working with Quad partners to bolster its comprehensive national power and to ensure that the framework of regional economic engagement is fair and



market-driven; emerging technologies improve living standards at home; supply chains are resilient; international standards in technologies like cyber, AI, telecom, space, etc. are in line with national interests; regional infrastructure projects contribute to sustainable development not unsustainable debt; and delivery of public goods bolsters influence and credibility across its extended neighbourhood.

In the context of the above goals, the outcomes of the Tokyo Quad Summit advanced India's strategic interests in several ways. First, it accommodated India's independent position on the Russia-Ukraine conflict by not directly condemning Russia in the joint statement. It enhanced understanding of India's perspective on the Ukrainian crisis. The three other Quad partners agreed to balance India's strategic concerns within the Quad's broader strategic convergence. What remains to be seen is the durability of this position. Furthermore, as the war in Europe prolongs, stress in Russia's economy and defence sector will bring into question its reliability for India's defence needs. Nevertheless, any realignment can only take place based on New Delhi's perception of its interests.

Second, Eastern Indian Ocean security received some attention in the Tokyo Quad Summit. The Indian Ocean comprises one of the three operational regions for IPMDA, in addition to the South China Sea and the Southern Pacific. The regional information fusion centre, based in India, will contribute to the interlinking centres for maritime domain awareness.

Third, India's participation in IPEF adds a much-needed geoeconomic dimension to its foreign policy. India has opted to remain out of regional economic frameworks like RCEP. The IPEF is not a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), and reflects the current reality that geopolitical interests cannot be compromised on the altar of free trade. IPEF allows India to engage with likeminded partners in the Indo-Pacific in areas other than trade tariffs. It also gives India the opportunity to adopt best practices prevalent among freemarket states, providing an incentive for domestic economic reforms.

The Quad's Limitations

Although the Quad has made commendable progress over the past two years, it remains an informal, ad-hoc and not institutionalised grouping, which comprises the US and its two regional allies, with India being the outlier and "partner". There is broad strategic convergence among them, but their perceptions and priorities do not entirely coincide. This was on display at the Quad Leaders' virtual meeting in March 2022, where the three allies tried to



arm-twist India on its position in the Ukrainian crisis.²⁸ The Japanese PM did not read the tea leaves and displayed unusual arrogance in hectoring India during a visit to New Delhi shortly thereafter, to no avail.

The Quad has an ambitious vision. However, the absence of formal monitoring mechanisms (apart from reviews of progress by Leaders at Quad summits) makes it vulnerable to being reduced to a talk shop. The loosely-defined scope of Quad cooperation also risks shortfalls in unfulfilled regional expectations and lack of focus on the future.

As the Quad comprises the four leading maritime democracies in the Indo-Pacific, it has the potential to be the leading instrument of influence and dissuasion against China's unilateralism and coercion. However, it has yet to establish that it can effectively compete with China for influence in the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands.

Implications for India-US Relations

The US is keen to wean India away from strategic dependence on Russia, including in the defence field, but this cannot be achieved overnight and will be a long term process, if it comes about at all. For now, the US has understood India's compulsions and is engaging in efforts to build trust in the bilateral relationship. It has also signalled a supportive stance on China's assertions along the border with India, and has been open to providing equipment to address threats to India's security in the continental domain. As far as the Indian Ocean is concerned, the US and its allies are encouraging India's aspirational role as a net security provider, but are unlikely to commit any significant resources that might mitigate the growing threat from the PLA Navy in the region.

For India, these realities carry major security implications. Meeting India's external balancing needs depends primarily on its bilateral partnership with the US. With the Biden administration's focus shifting from a Pentagon-led to a State Department-led approach to relations with India, there could be some changes in the direction of ties, particularly in the area of hard security issues. Here again, building trust and delivering on mutually reinforcing initiatives will be key.

²⁸Ministry of External Affairs of India. (2022). <u>Quad Leaders' Virtual meeting on 3 March 2022</u>.



V. Conclusions

In the global realignments that are taking place, outcomes for India's growing relations with the US and the West bear close watching. The driving factor remains China's multi-dimensional challenge, but the full-fledged great power proxy war over Ukraine is casting a shadow.

India's engagement in the Quad and IPEF serves its interests well, burnishing its democratic credentials, broadening its regional engagement and influence, and supporting domestic needs for economic growth, technological prowess and defence capability.

The US remains the most consequential partner for India. However, India should remain vigilant about existing challenges in this relationship, in particular their differing visions about the future direction of world order.

India's China challenge is unique and is not aligned with that of the US. It includes a historical border dispute, competition for influence in the Asian continental neighbourhood and the Indo-Pacific littoral, and questions of strategic deterrence. India can best deal with these issues under its own strength as an independent and autonomous power.

That said, in a highly volatile regional and global geopolitical environment, a realist approach based on values and interests will serve India well, and a deepening strategic partnership with the US will remain a critical factor in India's rise.



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