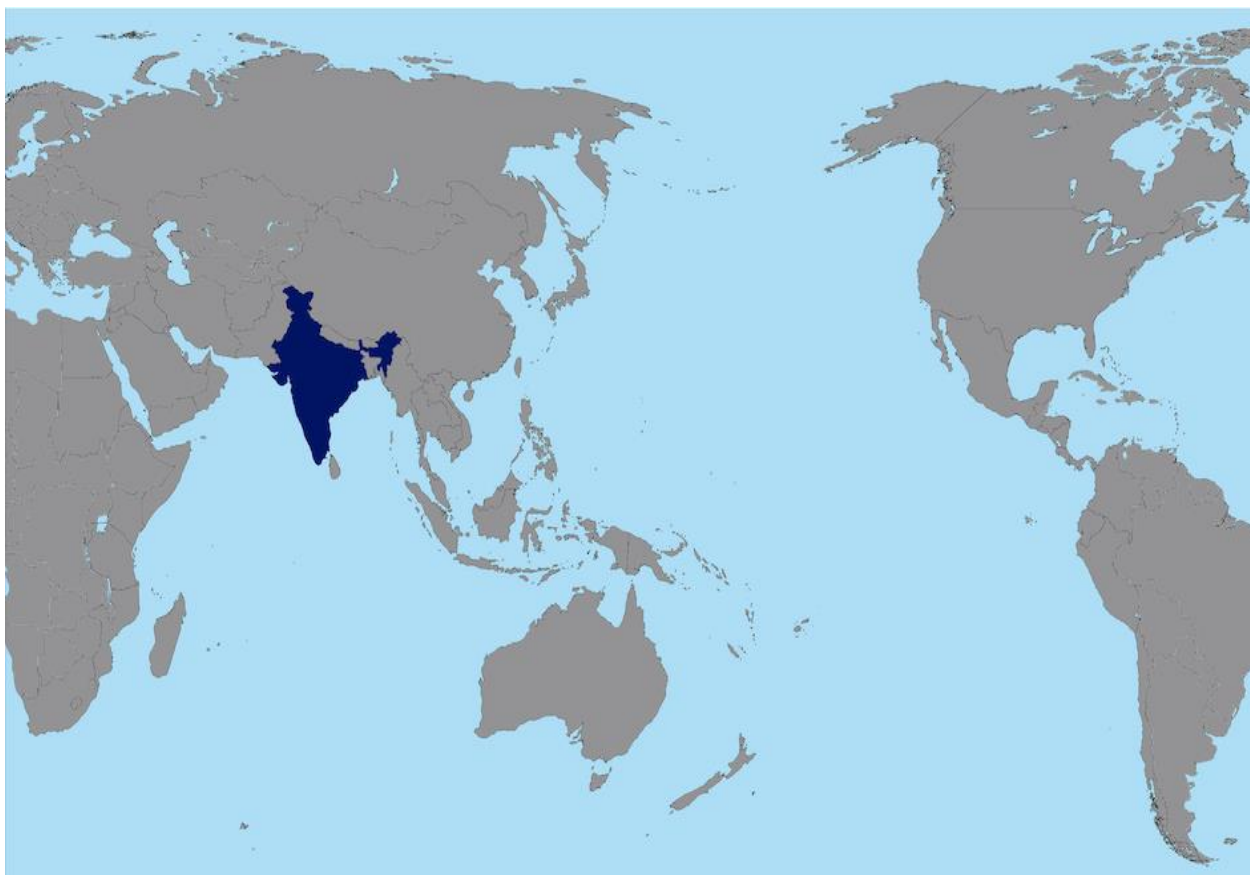




Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power

DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR SEPTEMBER 2021



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ABOUT US

Founded in 1994, the Delhi Policy Group (DPG) is among India's oldest think tanks with its primary focus on strategic and international issues of critical national interest. DPG is a non-partisan institution and is independently funded by a non-profit Trust. Over past decades, DPG has established itself in both domestic and international circles and is widely recognised today among the top security think tanks of India and of Asia's major powers.

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DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

This publication is a monthly analytical survey of developments and policy trends that impact India's interests and define its challenges across the extended Indo-Pacific maritime space, which has become the primary theatre of global geopolitical contestation. It is authored by Cmde. Lalit Kapur (Retd.), DPG Senior Fellow for Maritime Strategy, based on open source reports and publications. Your comments and feedback may be send at lalit@dpg.org.in. To subscribe, please [click here](#).

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DPG INDO-PACIFIC MONITOR

September 2021

Abstract

The month began with the sudden announcement by Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga that he would step down after just one year in office, setting the stage for the election of a successor. Fumio Kishida was elected as President of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party on September 29. He will assume charge as Japan's Prime Minister in early October and will lead the LDP in the general elections due in October-November 2021.

The inaugural India – Australia 2 + 2 Dialogue was held on September 10. The stage for this was set with Dr. S. Jaishankar, India's External Affairs Minister, delivering the JG Crawford Oration on "Why Quad Matters" at the Australian National University on September 06, and his Australian counterpart, Marise Payne, delivering the Third Indo-Pacific Oration in New Delhi three days later. The Dialogue resulted in a Joint Statement structured around four pillars: deepening COVID-19 cooperation, a shared vision of the Indo-Pacific, bilateral cooperation and people-to-people ties. The positive trend in this relationship thus continues, to the benefit of both countries and the Indo-Pacific. Meanwhile, Australia conducted three other 2 + 2 dialogues during the month, with Indonesia, South Korea and the US, to add to the 2 + 2 with France on August 30.

The surprise development was a joint announcement by Australia, the UK and the US on September 15 of a new security partnership named AUKUS. The first commitment under this partnership is to chalk out the path to deliver an operational SSN to the Royal Australian Navy, in lieu of the submarine project Australia and France have been working on for the last five years. A sharp reaction from France followed, with French Ambassadors to both Australia and the US being recalled for consultations. The AUKUS announcement firmly commits Australia to the US bandwagon. It also reflects US interest in building up Australia as an additional forward operating base, to cater for potential loss of deployments in South Korea, Japan and the Philippines which are within range of China's Anti-Access / Area Denial ballistic missiles. The US effort to win back its position in the Philippines continued to gather momentum.

The AUKUS announcement overshadowed release of the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy on September 16. This strategy focuses on economically engaging countries in the Indo-Pacific, with only limited attention to defending professed interests such as democracy, human rights, sovereignty of nations, territorial integrity and the rule of law. The contrast could not be starker: even as Australia made a conscious decision to prioritise regional security foundations over the economic dependence on China, the EU continues to prioritise the latter while largely glossing over serious challenges from China to its professed foundational principles.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the US from September 23-25, with his agenda including a summit with President Joe Biden, the first in person Quad Summit, and an address at the high-level segment of the UN General Assembly. There was visible movement on the Quad and bilateral India-US relationship, though the military-dominated element under the previous administration has receded in both. US-India bilateral ties are centred around building India's comprehensive power. The Quad and AUKUS will be two distinct tracks for countering the China challenge, with the former being focused on shaping the future rules based regional environment while AUKUS addresses the military challenge.

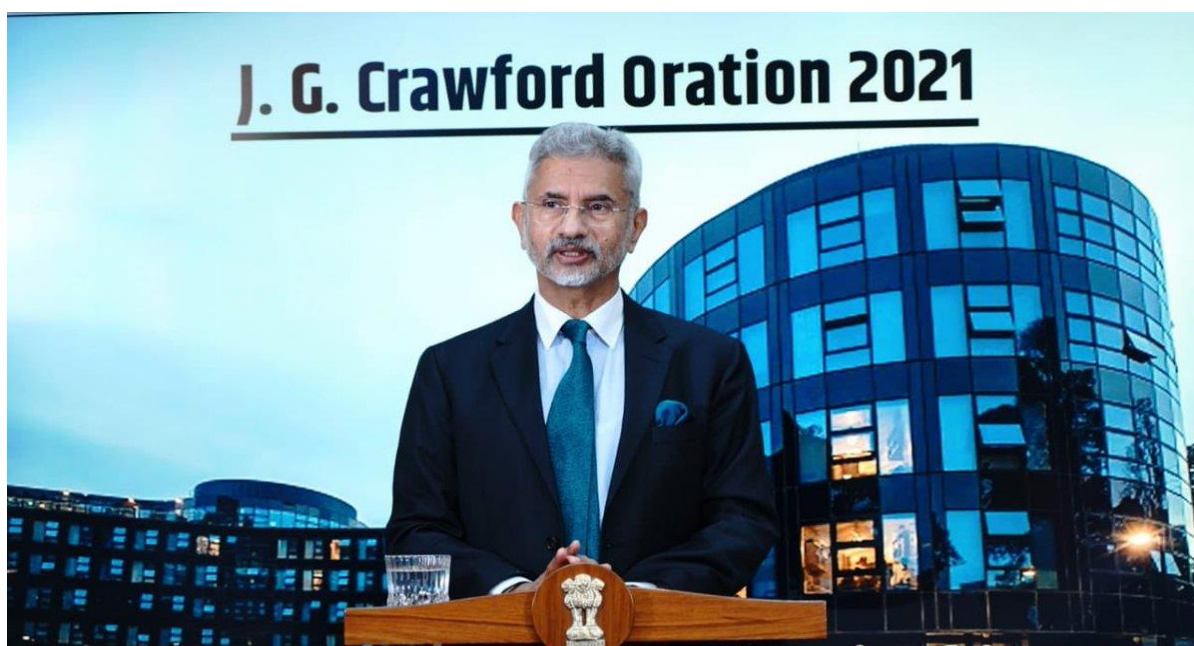
India continued its maritime outreach in the Indo-Pacific. This included the deployment of warships to deliver COVID-19 relief supplies to Bangladesh and Thailand, exercises SIMBEX, AUSINDEX and SAMUDRA SHAKTI with the Singaporean, Australian and Indonesian navies, and the Special Forces phase of Exercise Malabar. INS Tabar, meanwhile, was mission deployed off the Arabian Peninsula on return from her over 20,000 nm voyage to the Mediterranean, English Channel, North Sea and Baltic countries.

The US continued its high-level outreach to the Philippines, reversing the trend of setbacks that has been evident since the loss of Scarborough Shoal in 2012. China continued its aerial provocation, with 19 aircraft intruding into Taiwan's Southwestern ADIZ on September 5 and a joint exercise off Taiwan on September 17. USN ships in turn continued their Taiwan Straits transits and Freedom of Navigation patrols. The USS Carl Vinson and HMS Queen Elizabeth Carrier Task Groups exercised in the Western Pacific. HMS Richmond, part of CSG 21, made a deliberate transit through the Taiwan Straits on September 27, becoming the first RN warship to do so since 2008. The fact that this transit came after the AUKUS announcement was noteworthy.

In sum, the evidence suggests that the US is finally turning its attention to the Indo-Pacific instead of just talking about it. The coming months will show how strongly this trend will be sustained.

Why the Quad Matters

The JG Crawford Oration, titled "Why the Quad Matters", was delivered by External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar at the Australian National University on September 6, 2021¹. The introductory part dealt with changes that had taken place in the world since the end of the World War II. Europe, impacted by the Cold War, had opened new ground for strategic experimentation leading to the formation of the EU. Asia and the Indo-Pacific occupied a much vaster expanse, with a greater diversity and a lesser collective persona. US power had kept this region stable till recently.



EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar Delivering the J.G. Crawford Oration to ANU on September 6, 2021. Source: Twitter (@MEAIndia)

However, there was strategic recalibration by the US, due not just to commitments and deployments, but also to the relative growth of competitors and the increasing complexity of challenges. It would remain the world's premier power, but was coming to terms with its constraints and struggling with new manifestations of exerting influence and wielding power. It had

¹ External Affairs Minister's Remarks at JG Crawford Oration 2021, "Why the Quad Matters", https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/34222/External_Affairs_Ministers_Remarks_at_JG_Crawford_Oration_2021

inherent vulnerabilities, but also structural constraints for the contemporary forms of competition. US polity was going through serious introspection that could lead to different methods of engaging the world, greater emphasis on burden sharing and openness to partners. New forms of plurilateralism had also emerged, very different from the collectivism of Europe.

The second big driver of change was the growth of China. The enormous expansion of Chinese capabilities in virtually every field, its changing pattern of projecting its power and its deep relevance to the global economy had enabled focused leveraging of all aspects of its relationships for strategic purposes. The Indo-Pacific had thus entered a new phase of international relations and the full impact of China's re-emergence would be felt more than the impact of major powers before it.

The rationale for the Asia-Pacific was US focus on and primacy of the Far East, with the Indian Ocean becoming a strategic backwater. Globalisation had resulted in the footprint of nations expanding beyond traditional areas of activity. India's interests pulled it towards the Pacific, while those of Japan, China and Korea pulled them into the Indian Ocean. The compulsions of inter-dependence and inter-penetration prevailed over outdated definitions of theatres, necessitating that like-minded nations work together to deal with contemporary challenges and the security of the global commons. The Indo-Pacific thus represented globalisation as much as it did rebalancing.

India's Act East Policy went beyond just the economic dimension to include connectivity, security, education and societal exchanges. The embedding of India in ASEAN-led structures created a regular and comfortable interface with others present, including Australia. Platforms like IORA and IONS provided opportunity for greater socialisation of regional players, with those having similar outlooks tending to congregate together. So even as the regional grapples with different groupings, some would make more progress than others.

The days of unilateralism are over, bilateralism has its limits, and as COVID has demonstrated, multilateralism is simply not working well enough. Resistance to reforming international organisations forces a search for more practical and immediate solutions. That makes the case for the Quad.

The EAM then covered the transformation in India's relationship with the US, Japan and Australia in the last two decades. The Quad nations were democratic societies, market economies and pluralistic societies. Each had bilateral summit meetings with others. All were members of ASEAN-led forums. There

were also multiple triple combinations. All offered mutual logistic support and collaborated on white shipping, enabling better maritime security coordination. Each had a shared commitment to UNCLOS. Australia, India and Japan were also members of the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative.

Quad working took into account the consequences of globalisation, the requirements of the global commons and the expression of converging interests. The Quad agenda affirmed the intention to promote prosperity and greater stability in the Indo-Pacific. The Quad had focused on maritime security, cyber security, disaster response, connectivity, infrastructure, climate action and counter-terrorism. It had also chosen to get involved with vaccine production, student mobility, resilient supply chains and combating disinformation.

Risk aversion in region had gone up. The need was to create global capacities so that pandemic-scale challenges are more effectively met. Attention was also being given to cyber security, supply chains and disinformation. So not just landscape and structure of region had changed, so had the agenda.

Dr. S. Jaishankar concluded by saying that the existing 75-year old world order had run its course and was ripe for change. This would be driven by the national fortunes of major powers as well as the collective impact of greater rebalancing and multipolarity. The fate of the region could not be left to the decisions of a few. Those with interests and confidence had to step up. If the G-7 could become G-20, the Indo-Pacific could also find a broad-based decision making process. It was now critical that the future of the Indo-Pacific was determined through a collective and participative exercise.

The India - Australia 2 + 2 Dialogue

Australia's Foreign Minister and Minister for Women, Senator Marise Payne, and Minister for Defence Peter Dutton visited India on September 10 & 11, 2021. Their engagements included a meeting between Senator Marise Payne and Smt Smriti Zubin Irani, Union Minister for Women and Child Development²; delivery of the Third Indo-Pacific Oration³ by Senator Marise Payne; meetings

² Union Minister for Women and Child Development Smt Smriti Zubin Irani meets with Ms Marise Payne, Foreign Minister and Minister for Women of Australia, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1754011>

³ Third Indo-Pacific Oration, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/speech/third-indo-pacific-oration>

with their counterparts⁴, the first bilateral 2 + 2 Ministerial Dialogue⁵ and a joint call on the Prime Minister⁶.



The India – Australia 2 + 2 Ministerial Meeting in Progress at New Delhi, September 11, 2021. Source: PIB

The Third Indo-Pacific Oration was structured in four sections. The first traced out the evolution of the India-Australia relationship, from prehistoric times, including linkages between Australia's indigenous people and the ancient Indian civilisation, till the present. The second focused on the common Indo-Pacific vision, describing India and Australia as the northern and eastern anchors of the Indian Ocean, which was a major global maritime thoroughfare. It acknowledged the expansion of Australia's economic focus from its North (i.e. the Asia-Pacific) to the Indian Ocean as also India's pivotal role in the wider region. It described the challenges facing the Indo-Pacific, beginning with COVID-19 which had increased economic uncertainty and deepened risks of recession and protectionism; exacerbated pressure on rules, norms and institutions; fuelled dangerous disinformation; and affected supply chains. Other challenges included climate change, transnational crime, the persistent threat of terrorism, cyber and critical technology challenges and emerging

⁴ Press Statement of Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh following bilateral meeting with his Australian counterpart Mr Peter Dutton,
<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1753878>

⁵ Joint Statement on Inaugural Indi-Australia 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue (11 September 2021, New Delhi), https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/34250/Joint_Statement_on_Inaugural_IndiaAustralia_22_Ministerial_Dialogue_11_September_2021_New_Delhi

⁶ Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Women, Her Excellency Marise Payne, and Minister for Defence, His Excellency Peter Dutton call on Prime Minister,
<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1754209>

threats to security. The third section encompassed commonalities in outlooks of the two countries and covered the various mechanisms through which India and Australia were working together, including the Quad. The last section covered bilateral cooperation, with a focus on defence and economic aspects. It recognised that India was on a trajectory to become the global manufacturing hub and expressed the desire to work with India to achieve this ambition.

Shri Rajnath Singh, Dr S. Jaishankar, Senator Marise Payne and the Hon. Peter Dutton met for the First 2 + 2 Ministerial Dialogue on September 11, 2021. Their joint statement was structured around four pillars. The first was COVID-19, in which both resolved to deepen cooperation in vaccine manufacturing and delivery to Indo-Pacific partners; advance COVID-19 screening and study together its future health effects; work together to diversify supply chains for critical health, technology and other goods and services; underscored the importance of promoting economic openness and opposing coercive economic practices; and work together to progressively resume regular travel.

The second pillar was the shared vision for the Indo-Pacific, as well as regional and multilateral cooperation. Both sides agreed to enhance bilateral linkages to facilitate deeper engagement to improve maritime domain awareness, cooperation between maritime agencies and combat challenges posed by marine litter, single use plastic waste and IUU fishing. They reaffirmed national commitments to a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific; supported freedom of navigation, overflight and unimpeded commerce, and the adherence of all nations to UNCLOS as well as to peaceful resolution of disputes. They affirmed their commitment to a strong, resilient and inclusive regional architecture with ASEAN at its centre, and to work together in multinational fora to realise their long term objectives for the region, as well as to Quad cooperation and its common agenda. Both expressed concern about the developments in Myanmar, and agreed to remain alert to the broader repercussions of development in Afghanistan for ongoing terrorist threats in the region.

Bilateral cooperation formed the third pillar of discussions. They welcomed the recently concluded Phase I of Exercise Malabar. Australia invited India to participate in future Talisman Sabre exercises. They committed to operational logistics support while exploring longer term reciprocal arrangements, and to reinforce each other's maritime domain awareness through information sharing and practical cooperation. The stated desire to do more together to ensure free and open critical maritime corridors of the Indo-Pacific was notable. This could translate into coordination in monitoring the seas around these critical corridors. Among other areas, both agreed to enhance cyber

cooperation, explore cooperation in defence industry including in unmanned vehicles and other niche technologies; welcomed cooperation in space, on critical minerals and in the civil nuclear domain, and on counter-terrorism. They also committed to deepening the economic relationship under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and looked forward to the announcement of an interim agreement to liberalise bilateral trade in goods and services by December 2021, leading finally to the conclusion of a bilateral Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement.

The final pillar, strengthening people-to-people ties, looked forward to the early conclusion of a migration and mobility partnership agreement, welcomed the conclusion of the first India-Australia circular economy hackathon and agreed to organise similar events in the future, and sought to advance the bilateral partnership in education.

Relations between India and Australia have made remarkable progress since the two-way Prime Ministerial visits of 2014, and encompass an array of subjects, with defence, maritime security cooperation and coordination in multilateral fora at the forefront. The enunciation of India's first comprehensive ocean vision, the expansion of Australian focus to include the Indian Ocean and the acknowledgement of India's leadership role in the region are significant developments. The bilateral focus is now security the commons, including the maritime corridors passing through the Indian Ocean, the cyber commons, space and civil nuclear cooperation. There is promise of closer economic cooperation, triggered by Australia's India Economic Strategy to 2035⁷ (the Peter Varghese Report) and India's response by way of the Australia Economic Strategy Report 2020⁸.

The commitment to greater practical cooperation on defence is noteworthy. Australia is now a permanent invitee to Exercise Malabar. The allusion towards Malabar Phase I just having been completed indicates the possibility of a second phase in the offing. Closer practical cooperation in building coordinated domain awareness across the trade corridors spanning the Indian Ocean would go a long way towards making the maritime domain safer. The announcement by the Hon. Peter Dutton of an increase in Australian defence representation in New Delhi, in addition to the Australian Liaison Officer who has joined IFC (IOR) in February 2021, indicates confidence that the defence engagement and common purpose will grow.

⁷ An India Economic Strategy to 2035: Navigating from Potential to Delivery, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/india/ies/pdf/dfat-an-india-economic-strategy-to-2035.pdf>

⁸ Shri Piyush Goyal Launches India – Australia Economic Strategy Report, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1681689>

Though China continues to portray the Quad as an Asian NATO⁹ and Australia acting as a US pawn to contain Beijing, this is more out of its own paranoia and effort to block development of a viable opposition to its coercive power. Ministers have been careful to point out that the Quad remains a diplomatic entity, without military structures, directed to solving practical problems that cannot be addressed effectively through multilateral means (primarily because of China's obstructionism and coercion), and the inclusive nature of their Indo-Pacific visions. There is still no evidence of mutual defence commitments, which formed the bedrock for NATO. Given the vast geographical distance separating the Quad countries and their limited capabilities, mutual defence is an unlikely proposition.

The reality is that the blossoming of India – Australia bilateral cooperation started in 2014, at a time when Australia was still fully committed to its economic relationship with China. This was also before China's militarisation of the South China Sea islands, before its economic coercion of Australia, its assertion in the East China Sea and the unilateral change in status of Hong Kong. The 2 + 2 Ministerial Dialogue is strengthening of the bilateral relationship. China's protestations are unlikely to convince regional neighbours, particularly in Southeast Asia.

Defence industry cooperation and people-to-people exchanges remain weak links in the bilateral relationship, but these are work in progress. In sum, the India – Australia relationship appears to be heading in a direction that is not only mutually beneficial, but will benefit the region as a whole.

Will AUKUS Strengthen Indo-Pacific Stability?

An opinion piece from Marise Payne, Australia's Foreign Minister and Minister for Women, states "We must and will seize every opportunity, whether that is AUKUS, the rapid and positive evolution of the Quad, our strategic partnership with ASEAN, our energetic work as a member of the Pacific Islands Forum and with the European Union on the Indo-Pacific, or the strong bilateral friendships we have forged across the region". It describes AUKUS as "a vital initiative that complements rather than replaces other groupings", and as part of a "broad long-term endeavour to contribute our strengths as a significant regional power and to fulfil our global responsibilities"¹⁰. The rebuttal by Paul

⁹ Lin Minwang, "China Should be Vigilant of India Becoming de facto 'Sixth Eye'", September 13, 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202109/1234124.shtml>

¹⁰ Marise Payne, "Opinion Piece", September 27, 2021, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/news/opinion-piece>

Keating, Australia's Prime Minister from 1991 to 1996, points out that the "US submarine decision was not just about under-sea warfare, it was about donating eight submarines paid for by us to the command of the United States, (to be) an integral part of its Pacific Fleet"¹¹.



President Biden, flanked by Prime Ministers Scott Morrison and Boris Johnson (on screen) announcing the AUKUS Partnership, September 15, 2021. Source: Facebook (@WhiteHouse)

The AUKUS Alliance was the subject of a DPG Policy Brief published on September 25, 2021¹². The brief highlighted that the deterrent utility of AUKUS for Australia's purposes is limited. What matters is that Australia has shed its position of not choosing between the US and China, and has made a conscious strategic choice, prioritising security foundations over the economic edifice. How useful will Australia be in strengthening the Indo-Pacific security foundation?

To deal with the strategic challenge posed by the erstwhile Soviet Union, the US had decided to deploy 'forward' and leave no doubt that it would intervene in the event of adventurism. Soviet focus was directed towards industrialised Western Europe. The vital maritime corridors of that era, both from the

¹¹ Paul Keating, "A relic of a bygone age I might be, but I'm not a defeatist", September 29, 2021, <https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/a-relic-of-a-bygone-age-i-might-be-but-i-m-not-a-defeatist-20210928-p58vdu.html>

¹² Cmde. Lalit Kapur, "The AUKUS Alliance: Return to the Past?", September 25, 2021, <https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/publication/policy-briefs/the-aukus-alliance-return-to-the-past.html>

geostrategic and geo-economic perspectives, were across the Atlantic. Atlantic security and the collective security NATO alliance thus came to the forefront of US strategic thought. Other alliances such as CENTO, SEATO, ANZUS and bilateral arrangements with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Thailand were constructed to hem in the authoritarian challenge. CENTO and SEATO were dissolved following the bifurcation of Pakistan and the Vietnam War. US obligations to New Zealand under ANZUS, a non-binding agreement in any case, were suspended after the Kiwis initiated a nuclear-free zone in its territorial waters (they were renewed when New Zealand accepted ambiguity in whether USN ships did or did not have nuclear weapons on board). AUKUS overshadows ANZUS: New Zealand still maintains its nuclear free zone as part of its foreign policy and involves cooperation in nuclear submarines, which New Zealand has refused to support. The two members of the Anglosphere in the Southern Pacific are evidently moving in different directions.

The China challenge is quantitatively and qualitatively different from that posed by the erstwhile Soviet Union. China already possesses the world's largest standing army, navy, coast guard, maritime militia and conventional missile force. Its Anti-Access/Area Denial capability, including the DF-16 and DF-26 Anti-Ship Ballistic Missiles, have turned the Western Pacific into a no-go area for US Carrier Strike Groups in times of conflict, at least till the ASBM threat is mitigated. China's growing military power has emboldened it to strengthen its grey zone coercion and will, at some stage, lead to China concluding that it can attain political objectives at an acceptable cost by using military force. The fact that forward US bases in South Korea, Japan, the Philippines and Guam have all become vulnerable results in weakening of deterrence. A pre-emptive strike on them could roll-back US forward positions leaving the US unable to impose costs on China.

The critical need is to disperse US forward deployed strength, including to forward bases that are outside China's ASBM range. This is where AUKUS could be the first step in a strategy to provide the US alternative forward positions. Australia's vast open spaces, huge coastline of nearly 26,000 Km length, widespread island territories in the Pacific, Indian and Southern Oceans and resource potential make it an attractive partner. A rotational USMC deployment to Darwin already permits the US to train and exercise with Australia. This can now be expected to grow to include the USN, with pre-positioned equipment, personnel, ships, submarines and even aircraft increasingly using Australian space, thus cutting down the time needed for blocking forces to reach deployment areas in the Western Pacific.

Whether a purely military approach will suffice to enhance deterrence remains a moot question. That is why AUKUS and the Quad must remain distinct approaches. The latent military potential of the Quad will always remain and cannot be discounted, but given China's increasing high-handedness, there is need of a more visible demonstration also.

The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

On September 16, 2021, one day after the AUKUS announcement, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy released the proposed EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and invited the European Parliament and the Council to endorse it and work together for implementation of its actions. As comes out clearly from his remarks, "Our strategy is built on the will to cooperate, not to confront"¹³.



Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy at the Release of the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific on September 16, 2021. Source: European Commission

¹³ Indo-Pacific: Remarks by the High Representative/Vice President at the Press Conference on the Joint Communication, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/104215/indo-pacific-remarks-high-representativevice-president-press-conference-joint-communication_en

The strategy comprises four sections¹⁴: the rationale for the EU strengthening its engagement with the Indo-Pacific; the principles that will guide this engagement; the EU's approach to partnership and cooperation in the region; and details of how the EU will pursue the vision in cooperation with partners.

The strategy acknowledges that the Indo-Pacific is where the world's centre of gravity is moving, both in geo-economic and geo-political terms. As High Commissioner Josep Borrell says, "... one of the two aorta veins of the EU's economy goes through this region". That gives the EU "a big stake in the region's future, and the desire to contribute to the peace, stability and prosperity of the region"¹⁵. The strategy recognises that the Indo-Pacific is an important source of global environmental challenges; that intense competition has resulted in a significant military build-up, including by China; that the display of force and increasing tensions in regional hotspots such as the South and East China Seas and the Taiwan Straits may have a direct impact on European security and prosperity; that democratic principles and human rights are under threat from authoritarian regimes while efforts to establish a global level playing-field based on transparent trade rules are increasingly undermined by unfair trade practices and economic coercion; that the impact of both the COVID 19 pandemic and the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan demonstrate the direct impact Indo-Pacific events have on Europe's security; and that it is thus essential for the EU to reinforce cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners to promote the rules-based international order, access to open markets and a stable trading environment. The rationale is thus clearly financial, with the threats and challenges comprising window-dressing.

The EU's professed principles for engagement with Indo-Pacific partners are very similar to those propounded by the US and Quad partners: solidify and defend the rules based international order; respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law; promotion of a level playing field and an open and fair environment for trade and investment; contribution to Sustainable Development Goals, addressing climate change and environmental degradation; pursuing long-standing multilateral and regional cooperation with UN and Bretton Woods Institutions as well as regional organisations such as ASEAN and the African Union; supporting inclusive policy-making and cooperation where the voices of civil society, the private sector, social partners and other key stakeholders count; defending human rights and democracy

¹⁴ Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, The EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,
https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_2021_24_1_en.pdf

¹⁵ Indo-Pacific: Remarks by the High Representative/Vice President at the Press Conference on the Joint Communication, see Footnote 1 above.

including by using sanctions against individuals, entities and bodies responsible for, involved in, or associated with violations and abuses worldwide; supporting women's rights and gender equality and full compliance with International Humanitarian Law. The principles talk of supporting durable solutions to large-scale and protracted refugee situations, like in Afghanistan and the Rohingya crisis. There is, however, no mention of Xinjiang or Tibet, or even Myanmar, indicating that the EU will raise its voice only on those areas that don't impact its economic relationships.

The approach to partnerships is to deepen the engagement with long-standing partners throughout the region; reinforce cooperation with multilateral and regional organisations to promote effective rules-based multilateralism in the region; undertake crisis management, conflict prevention and resilience building initiatives; and work with member states through a Team Europe approach with concrete initiatives at country and regional levels. This includes engaging with China to promote solutions to common challenges, cooperate on issues of common interest and encouraging China to play its part in a peaceful and thriving Indo-Pacific region. The strategy avers that the EU will continue to protect its essential interests and promote its values while pushing back where fundamental disagreements exist with China, such as on human rights, but without addressing how it will develop the capacities needed to push back. It recognises that the Indian Ocean is the gateway for Europe into the Indo-Pacific and stability and freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean are therefore vital. It acknowledges the centrality of ASEAN and supports the ASEAN-led process towards an effective, substantive and legally binding Code of Conduct in the South China Sea which should not prejudice the rights of third parties.

Seven priority areas have been identified to pursue the EU Indo-Pacific vision: sustainable and inclusive prosperity; green transition; ocean governance; digital governance and partnership; connectivity; security and defence; and human security. The security and defence pillar focuses on maintaining and enhancing naval deployment by member states to the region to deal with non-traditional challenges; maritime security capacity-building; broadening the EU partnership, including with ASEAN and IONS; addressing new security challenges such as cybersecurity, nuclear safety and non-proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons; and combating information manipulation and interference by state and non-state actors in the Indo-Pacific by identifying, analysing, assessing, countering and imposing costs.

Following the US – EU Summit on June 15, 2021, the two had agreed to consult closely on and cooperate on the full range of issues regarding China, including

on human rights violations in Xinjiang and Tibet, the erosion of autonomy in Hong Kong and on disinformation, economic coercion and regional security issues. The EU had acknowledged that China posed a significant challenge. The Brussels Communiqué issued after the NATO Summit mentioned the challenges posed by China repeatedly. The EU Strategy for the Indo-Pacific, issued after consultation with partners in Asia (but with no reference to consultation with the US)¹⁶ indicates that prospects for US – EU cooperation on China have receded. US unilateralism, rather than consultation as promised, accompanied by the EU's bureaucratic approach appears to have taken its toll. The situation can still be retrieved, but will require substantial diplomatic effort from both sides.

The EU may hope to avoid confronting China, as the strategy indicates, but find China has no compunction about confronting EU nations and dividing them as it has successfully divided ASEAN. This is visible in China's coercion of Lithuania over the latter's authorisation to Taiwan to open a representative office in Vilnius and to open a reciprocal office in Taipei, as well as its challenge to China's attempts to gain a political foothold in Central and Eastern Europe¹⁷. Lithuania's Defence Ministry has advised consumers to avoid buying Chinese phones and throw away the ones they already have because they have built-in censorship capabilities¹⁸. The EU position, however, remains ambivalent.

The EU strategy avoids addressing the question of what the EU will do if China refuses to compromise (as it is increasingly doing) and insists on cooperation only on its own terms. As an example, the EU strategy specifically seeks to strengthen semiconductor value chains and pursue a trade and investment agreement with Taiwan, but fails to address whether this will extend to even arming democratic Taiwan to tackle China's authoritarianism. The likelihood that EU member nations will be targeted by Chinese coercion appears high. But the EU has evidently turned a blind eye to these possibilities, as well as to China's successful use of hostage diplomacy in arresting Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig to obtain the release of Meng Wanzhou¹⁹, or similar actions with

¹⁶ See Footnote 14 above.

¹⁷ Franklin D Kramer and Hans Binnendijk, "The China-Lithuania Rift is a Wake-Up Call for Europe, September 22, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/09/22/china-lithuania-taiwan-eu-nato/>

¹⁸ Andrius Sytas, "Lithuania says throw away Chinese phones due to censorship concerns", September 22, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/lithuania-says-throw-away-chinese-phones-due-censorship-concerns-2021-09-21/>

¹⁹ China frees Canadians Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig after Huawei boss released, September 25, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-58687071>

Australian citizens Kylie Moore-Gilbert, Cheng Lei and Yang Hengjun²⁰. Its pretensions to 'principles' thus stand exposed.

Many of the seven priority areas identified by the EU strategy involve cooperation with India. There is no doubt considerable scope for cooperation in non-traditional security challenges and on enhancing India's trade. It would, however, be somewhat optimistic to expect that the EU will be of significant help in managing larger security issues. India should thus continue to pursue the trade and investment track with the EU, without expecting significant value addition on the foundational hard security front.

The Modi Biden Summit

The Modi-Biden Summit on September 24, 2021, the first in-person engagement between leaders of the world's oldest and largest democracies, continues the trend of convergence between the leaderships of India and the US cutting across party lines. The Joint Statement issued after the summit²¹ is structured around seven pillars: Building the strategic partnership; working together with regional groupings including ASEAN and the QUAD to promote shared Indo-Pacific interests; the trade and investment partnership for mutual prosperity; finishing the fight against the pandemic; galvanizing global effort on climate change; strengthening democratic values and institutions; and enhancing person-to-person ties.

On the global strategic partnership front, India and the US are working together under the Quad on COVID-19 response and pandemic preparedness, infrastructure, space, clean energy, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, cyber security, maritime security, resilient supply chains, approaches to 5G infrastructure deployment and critical and emerging technologies. They will co-host the fourth annual Indo-Pacific Business Forum in October 2021, bringing together leaders in government, industry, media and other organisations from across the Indo-Pacific to develop a positive economic agenda for the Indo-Pacific region. President Biden welcomed India's announcement that it will resume exports of vaccines, including to COVAX. The leaders hailed finalisation of the MoU on Health and Biomedical Sciences

²⁰ Stephen Dziedzic, "Australia joins coalition to condemn hostage diplomacy to pressure China and other countries over use of foreigners as 'bargaining chips' ", <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-02-16/australia-joins-canada-end-arrest-foreigners-hostage-diplomacy/13158578>

²¹ US – India Joint Leaders' Statement: A Partnership for Global Good (September 24, 2021), https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/34320/USIndia_Joint_Leaders_Statement_A_Partnership_for_Global_Good_September_24_2021

to bolster cooperation on areas affecting global health, including pandemic preparedness and biomedical research.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Joe Biden at their Summit Meeting in Washington DC, September 24, 2021. Source: Twitter (@ PMO)

There was agreement on the counter-terror front, with the leaders affirming that the two nations stood together in the fight against global terrorism including all groups proscribed by the UNSCR 1267 sanctions committee (this includes Pakistan-based groups including the Jaish-i-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba, the ETIM, included at China's behest and Sirajuddin Haqqani, currently Afghanistan's Interior Minister²²). They expressed satisfaction at the present status of counter-terror cooperation, as well as efforts to strengthen intelligence sharing and law enforcement. There was also agreement on the need for the Taliban to comply with UNSC Resolution 2593 (2021) and for the swift return of democracy to Myanmar. Both leaders welcomed increased cooperation under the Quad, including in the multilateral domain. President Biden reiterated US support for India's permanent membership on a reformed UN Security Council and for India's entry in to the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

²² United Nations Security Council Consolidated List, September 26, 2021, <https://scsanctions.un.org/p86vhen-all.html#alqaedaent>

On the protecting the planet and powering the future fronts, both are committed to promoting a successful outcome at the 26th UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow later this year. The countries are working together through the Climate Action and Finance Mobilisation Dialogue as well as the Strategic Clean Energy Partnership (SCEP) to realise India's target of deploying 450 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030. Hydrogen Biofuels Task Forces have been launched under SCEP to help in the clean energy transition. The US invited India to participate in the Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate, which will be launched at COP 26. Prime Minister Modi hailed President Biden's initiative to convene the Global COVID-19 Summit on ending the pandemic and building back better to prepare for the next.

On the trade and development front, the India-US Trade Policy Forum is to be reconvened before the end of the year to address bilateral trade concerns, identify specific areas for increased engagement and develop an ambitious, shared vision for the future of the trade relationship. The US-India CEO Forum and Commercial Dialogue is to be convened in early 2022, to leverage the latent potential of the private sector. Negotiation on an Investment Incentive Agreement is ongoing; both sides have committed to early conclusion. Google is working with Indian organisations to empower a million women entrepreneurs with digital literacy and related skills. IBM will offer cybersecurity training to 500,000 people in India over the next five years. Microsoft is to launch a Faculty Development Programme in India, to train 5,000 master trainers in cyber security and data privacy, who will in turn train 200,000 Indian youth for careers in cybersecurity. The US International Development Finance Corporation is to launch a \$100 million credit facility in partnership with HDFC Bank and Mastercard, dedicated to small businesses interested in digitising. The leaders discussed how India and the US will work together to set up sustainable and transparent rules of the road to lift economies throughout the Indo-Pacific.

In the Indo-Pacific, the two countries look forward to the upcoming Counterterrorism Joint Working Group and Homeland Security Dialogue and the work of the US-India Counter Narcotics Working Group. India and the US have agreed in July to a \$ 22 million project to co-develop air launched UAVs. The US has offered India F/A-18, F-15EX and F-21 fighter aircraft, MQ-9B unmanned aerial systems, the IADWS missile system and additional P-8I maritime patrol aircraft. India operates C-130J and C-17 US-origin transport aircraft, as well as P-8I maritime patrol aircraft (the 11th aircraft is to be delivered in October), and MH-60R multi-mission maritime helicopters. President Biden reaffirmed the unwavering commitment of the US to India as a Major Defence Partner through close engagements in information gathering, sharing of

logistics, military-to-military interactions, strengthening cooperation in advanced military technologies (but apparently not in the underwater domain) and expanding engagements in a multilateral framework including with regional partners. The leaders also welcomed the deepening of advanced industrial cooperation and looked forward to the inaugural meeting of the Industrial Security Agreement Summit to facilitate high-end defence industrial collaboration.

On the exploring space front, the two countries seek to build on ongoing cooperation in deep-space communications support, space science, India's Chandrayaan mission, and to ensure the long-term sustainability of outer space activity. The NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture (NISAR) satellite is to be launched from India in 2023. The US has welcomed India's consideration of potential cooperation in the Artemis Accords, which support the safe and transparent exploration of space. India and US look forward to finalisation of a Space Situational Awareness MoU that will help in sharing data and services towards ensuring the long-term sustainability of outer space by the end of the year.

On people-to-people ties as well as the science, education and innovation fronts, the US has issued 62,000 visas to Indian students so far in 2021. The nearly 200,000 Indian students in the US contribute \$ 7.7 billion to the US economy. The upcoming US-India Alliance for Women's Economic Empowerment will help advance women's economic resilience and empowerment in India. The US National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration works closely with Indian agencies in ocean and fisheries science, meteorology and earth observation, enabling better understanding of climate change. The US Department of Agriculture looks forward to cooperating with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research on climate-change issues related to agriculture, while USAID looks forward to working with the Indian government on establishing the US-India Gandhi-King Development Foundation to promote initiatives and exchanges.

There is discernible shift in focus in the summits of February 2020²³ and this one. In 2020, the military component, of trying to attract India to tie in with the US Indo-Pacific vision was at the forefront. Though there is no pulling back on Indo-Pacific objectives or the military relationship, there appears to be recognition that India will not be inveigled into a military alliance. The focus

²³ Joint Statement: Vision and Principles for India-US Comprehensive Global Partnership, <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/32421/Joint+Statement+Vision+and+Principles+for+IndiaUS+Comprehensive+Global+Strategic+Partnership>

has shifted to other drivers of a truly broad-based relationship, which have been given greater weight as compared to the military component this time.

The current summit statement contains no mention of China or the South China Sea, or of trilateral cooperation between the Quad partners. Having only just pulled back from Afghanistan, the US is unlikely to get involved in another military adventure, this time in Southeast Asia. US security focus remains East Asia and the Asia-Pacific, as is evident from the AUKUS. The objective in the Indian Ocean remains security of trade routes, but with India retaining lead responsibility in the Indian Ocean. While engagement to strengthen India's capacity and capability will continue, measures like re-institution of the First Fleet for Indian Ocean operations, as envisaged by the Trump administration, are unlikely to be followed through. This will force India to step up its preparation for Indian Ocean contingencies. Notable, however, is the absence of any commitment by President Biden to visit India in the near future.

The convergence between India and the US continues, as is evident from the numerous initiatives, both in progress and proposed. The potential remains great. The renewed attention to trade and investment, as well as to people-to-people exchanges is notable. In the absence of unforeseen black swan events, the bilateral relationship can be expected to continue forging ahead.

The Quad in Person Summit

While AUKUS was about strengthening the military component of the US' China strategy, the Quad Summit was about strengthening lines of communication between the leaders and pooling capabilities to address critical non-military issues. The military component remained latent and did not form part of the discussion.

The virtual summit on March 12, 2021, had focused on one area of joint action (the Quad Vaccine Partnership) and two areas (climate and critical and emerging technologies) where working groups were established to evaluate concrete ideas for cooperation²⁴. The in-person summit on September 24, 2021, provided a report card on these three areas and identified four more areas where the Quad would work together: infrastructure; person-to-person exchanges and education; cyber security; and space²⁵.

²⁴ Quad Leaders' Joint Statement: "The Spirit of the Quad", March 12, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/12/quad-leaders-joint-statement-the-spirit-of-the-quad/>

²⁵ Joint Statement from Quad Leaders, September 24, 2021, https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/34318/Joint_Statement_from_Quad_Leaders

The Quad Vaccine Partnership had committed to expanding manufacturing at the Biological E facilities in India to produce at least 1 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines for export by the end of 2022 and strengthening “last-mile” vaccination through the Indo-Pacific. It had launched a senior-level Quad Vaccine Experts Group to smoothen the path to delivery on this commitment. The Joint Statement records²⁶ that as of September 24, the QUAD countries had delivered nearly 79 million safe doses through the Indo-Pacific. Biological E is on track to manufacture Johnson & Johnson’s Janssen as well as its own Corbevax vaccines in sufficient numbers to fulfil Quad commitments. India will resume exports beginning October 2021. A dashboard²⁷ providing details of the partnership, its principles, commitments and pledges and an overview of deliveries to date became accessible on September 24. Quad countries have also committed to hosting an event at the 75th World Health Assembly (in May 2022) dedicated to combating hesitancy, conducting at least one pandemic preparedness tabletop or exercise in 2022 and strengthening cooperation on the 100-Day Mission – to have safe and effective vaccines and associated therapeutics and diagnostics available within 100 days – now and into the future.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, President Joe Biden, Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga at the Quad Summit in Washington DC on September 24, 2021. Source: PMO

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Quad Country COVID-19 Response Beta Dashboard, https://share.usaid.gov/views/QUADCOUNTRYCOVID-19ResponseDashboard/Indo-PacificRegionOverview?%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3Adisplay_count=n&%3AshowVizHome=n&%3Aorigin=viz_share_link&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&%3Aembed=y

On climate, the March 12 Summit had established a working group to strengthen implementation of the Paris Agreement, strengthen climate action globally, advance low-emissions technology solutions to support emissions reduction, and cooperate on climate mitigation, technology, capacity-building and finance. The September 24 Summit carried these initiatives forward by announcing the intention to form a green-shipping network, establish a clean-hydrogen partnership, and enhance climate adaptation, resilience and preparedness. The first seeks to invite leading ports, including Los Angeles, Mumbai, Sydney and Yokohama, to form a network dedicated to greening and decarbonising the shipping value chain and establish two or three Quad low-emission or zero-emission shipping corridors by 2030. The second seeks to scale up production of clean hydrogen, delivery infrastructure for its transportation, storage and distribution, and stimulating market demand to accelerate trade in clean hydrogen in the Indo-Pacific. The third climate adaptation initiative seeks to improve critical climate information-sharing and build a new technical facility through the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure that will provide technical assistance to small island developing states.

There is visible movement on the critical and emerging technology front. A Quad statement of principles on technology design, development and use was launched on September 24, 2021²⁸. Quad countries have agreed to establish Technical Standards Contact Groups on Advanced Communications and Artificial Intelligence as well as foundational pre-standardisation research. They have announced their intention to launch a joint semiconductor supply chain initiative to map capacity, identify vulnerabilities and bolster supply-chain security for semiconductors and their vital components. They have also launched at Track 1.5 industry dialogue on Open Radio Access Network (O-RAN) deployment and adoption, and intend to jointly facilitate enabling environments for 5G diversification. The Quad will also monitor trends in biotechnology scanning, including synthetic biology, genome sequencing and bio-manufacturing, with the intention of identifying related opportunities for cooperation.

A welcome development is the adoption of Infrastructure as a Quad partnership focal area. A Quad Infrastructure Coordination Group has been launched to meet regularly and share assessments of Indo-Pacific infrastructure needs and coordinate approaches to deliver transparent, high-standards infrastructure with the G-7 and G-20. The intention is to ensure

²⁸ Quad Principles on Technology Design, Development, Governance, and Use, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/24/quad-principles-on-technology-design-development-governance-and-use/>

efforts of the Quad partners are mutually reinforcing and complementary, and catalyse the flow of private-sector investment into the region.

Another initiative is the launch of the Quad Fellowship, administered by a philanthropic initiative overseen by Schmidt Futures in consultation with a task force comprising leaders from each Quad country. The programme will bring together 100 exceptional master's and doctoral level students in the STEM disciplines from the Quad countries to study at leading STEM universities in the US. The programme will be sponsored by private sector companies.

The Quad committed to launch a new effort to bolster critical infrastructure-resilience against cyber threats by bringing together the expertise of nations to drive domestic and international best practices. A Quad Senior Cyber Group has been launched, with leader-level experts meeting regularly to drive improvement in adoption and implementation of shared cyber standards, development of secure software, building workforce and talent, and promoting the scalability and cybersecurity of secure and trustworthy digital infrastructure.

The final area of cooperation identified is space, with the Quad partners beginning discussion to share Earth observation satellite data and analyses on climate-change risks and the sustainable use of the oceans and marine resources. The partners will also enhance capacity building for sustainable development of space-related domains in other Indo-Pacific nations to manage their risks and challenges. They will consult on norms, guidelines, principles and rules for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the outer space environment.

The Quad's focus on principles and common values reiterated in the joint statement and the relatively easy to cooperate in looming challenges, instead of more difficult challenges of the past, is wise. It will help assuage concerns of smaller regional nations in South East Asia, and to some extent in the EU. The habits of cooperation thus built up will go a long way into enabling mutual understanding. The partnership being in its formative stages, the focus is naturally greater on measures to create and strengthen new areas of cooperation. Delivery on commitments is still some distance away and there will necessarily be gaps between expectation and actual result. Coordination at the leadership level will play a large part in bridging these gaps.

Current day problems have not been lost sight of, but remain at the diplomatic discussion level. This too is natural, given the US exhaustion with conflict in the Middle East as a measure to resolve strategic problems and the desire to pay

greater attention to diplomatic tools instead. A common position on Afghanistan, in line with India's views, has emerged. The need to ensure that the Quad is a force for regional peace, stability, security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific has been highlighted without introducing a military element. There is mutual concern regarding North Korea, as well as Myanmar, with backing for implementation of ASEAN's Five Point Consensus. There is also the commitment to deepen cooperation in multilateral institutions to enhance the resilience of the multilateral system. There is commitment for leaders and foreign ministers to meet annually, for senior officials to meet regularly, and for working groups to continue a steady tempo to produce the cooperation to build a stronger region.

There is predictable disappointment amongst the commentariat that the Quad does not do more on the military front. It is, on balance, better that the Quad remains focused on diplomatic coordination, without the structures required to convert it into a military alliance. This will help the Quad gaining greater acceptability within the Indo-Pacific and avoiding China's propaganda trap. Consideration could be give to inviting France to join the grouping, in view of its strong bilateral relationships with the four present partners as well as its undoubted interests in the Indo-Pacific. In sum, the Quad seems to be on the right path, leaving alternate mechanisms such as bilateral alliances and AUKUS to deal with military contingencies.

Indo-Pacific Snippets

Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered a virtual address to the 6th Eastern Economic Forum at Vladivostok on September 3, 2021²⁹. Reiterating the commitment for India to "Act Far-East" he had announced at Vladivostok during the 2019 edition, he announced that Mazagon Docks Limited (MDL) would partner with Zvezda for construction of commercial vessels, apart from partnering Russia in space exploration and in the opening of the Northern Sea Route for international trade and commerce. He also highlighted India's participation in gas projects in the Amur region and progress in the Chennai – Vladivostok maritime corridor. Established in 2015, the Zvezda Shipbuilding Complex is billed as Russia's largest shipyard for construction of vessels and production platforms for the Russian Continental Shelf. Collaborating with it could result in MDL gaining substantially by way of experience in modern techniques of ship-building. Cooperation in the Amur region projects and in

²⁹ PM Modi's Virtual Address at Eastern Economic Forum 2021, https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pms-virtual-address-at-eastern-economic-forum-2021/?comment=disable

the Chennai-Vladivostok corridor will add substantially to India's Pacific interests, pulling it further into the Indo-Pacific.



Australia's Foreign Minister Senator Marise Payne and Defence Minister Hon Peter Dutton, MP with Indonesian Minister for Foreign Affairs Retno Marsudi and Minister for Defence Prabowo Subianto at the 2+2 Dialogue in Jakarta, September 09, 2021.

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic Of Indonesia

The Seventh Indonesia – Australia Foreign and Defence Ministers 2+2 Meeting took place at Jakarta on September 9, 2021. The joint statement³⁰ on completion reiterated the commitment of the ministers to deepen cooperation under the five pillars of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of 2018: the economic and development partnership, connecting people, securing shared interests, maritime cooperation, and Indo-Pacific stability and prosperity. They underscored the importance of maintaining and promoting a stable, peaceful, prosperous, resilient and inclusive Indo-Pacific where ASEAN plays a central and strategic role. Defence Ministers signed a renewed Defence Cooperation Arrangement to carry forward the bilateral defence partnership. They also shared perspectives on the regional situation, including in Myanmar, the South China Sea, Afghanistan, and on counter-terrorism and cyber-

³⁰ Seventh Indonesia-Australia Foreign and Defence Ministers 2+2 Meeting, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/peter-dutton/statements/seventh-indonesia-australia-foreign-and-defence-ministers-22>

security cooperation. They committed to enhanced trilateral cooperation with India, Timor-Leste and with Pacific Island nations.

The Fifth Australia – Republic of Korea Foreign and Defence Ministers' 2+2 Meeting took place on September 13, 2021. The joint statement³¹ issued on completion welcomes the decision to upgrade the bilateral relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. The five main sections of the statement relate to COVID-19 cooperation; bilateral cooperation with a range of new initiatives in areas including pandemic response, climate change, cyber and critical technology, space, resilient supply chains and free trade; defence and security cooperation; the Korean Peninsula; and regional and global cooperation. The countries have agreed to explore new institutional foundations to enhance defence cooperation and identified initiatives in defence industry and materiel. An MoU on Mutual Logistics Support and Cooperation has been signed. There is agreement to increase joint exercises, training port calls and aircraft visits to improve interoperability. Both sides also look forward to cooperation under the recent ROK-US-AUS Trilateral Framework on Defence Research, Development, Testing and Evaluation. In sum, the Dialogue indicates increased Australian presence in East Asia.

The 31st US-Australia 2 + 2 consultations (AUSMIN) took place on September 16, 2021. The 20-page joint statement³² reaffirms the Indo-Pacific as the focus of the alliance. The Indo-Pacific Cooperation section reaffirms the commitment of the ministers to working through the Quad to "support Indo-Pacific partners to respond to the defining challenges of our times". It reiterates commitment to ASEAN centrality, while identifying common positions on regional challenges including the Mekong sub-region, Myanmar, the South China Sea, Taiwan, COVID-19 alleviation, the Pacific Islands Forum, infrastructure and freedom from external coercion. Other sections of the joint statement define common positions connected with COVID-19 recovery and public health; democratic values and multilateralism including the challenges posed by the PRC across the region; climate, clean energy and the environment; defence and security; the AUKUS partnership; advancing force posture cooperation and alliance integration (covering land, sea, air and logistic elements); strategic capabilities cooperation; industry, technology and innovation; and cyber

³¹ Joint Statement: Australia-Republic of Korea Foreign and Defence Ministers' 2+2 Meeting 2021, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/joint-statement-australia-republic-korea-foreign-and-defence-ministers-22-meeting-2021>

³² Joint Statement on Australia-US Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIC) 2021, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2780670/joint-statement-on-australia-us-ministerial-consultations-ausmin-2021/>

security issues. The range and depth of cooperation virtually preclude Australia taking an independent position in the Indo-Pacific in the years ahead.

The US outreach to the Philippines continued to make headway, with National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan meeting Secretaries Delfin Lorenzana and Teodoro Locsin on September 9³³. Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin also met Secretary of State Antony Blinken the same day³⁴, while Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana met Defense Secretary General Lloyd Austin on September 10³⁵. General David Berger, Commandant of the US Marine Corps, visited the Philippines on September 10 & 11. The flurry of high-level interaction indicates a concerted effort on the part of the US to wean the Philippines away from China. If successful, it will provide the US a wide range of options to hem in China in the Philippines.

An on-line briefing to the media by Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison on September 30 focused on the India – Australia relationship³⁶. Prime Minister Morrison talked about visiting India to mark the 75th anniversary of India's independence and the bilateral India-Australia partnership, including in the low emissions technology partnership agreement, prospects for the trade partnership, his satisfaction at progress in bilateral military cooperation and in critical and emerging technologies, including 5G and 6G, cyber, critical minerals and space. He saw the Quad moving into a new ambitious chapter and spoke of the complete understanding and support Prime Ministers Modi and Suga had exhibited when he met them in Washington DC. He also highlighted the continued relevance of ASEAN centrality.

Admiral Karambir Singh, India's Chief of the Naval Staff, visited the Sultanate of Oman from September 27-29³⁷. India and Oman signed a Memorandum of Understanding for exchange of White Shipping Information on the first day of

³³ Statement by NSC Spokesperson Emily Horne on National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan's Meeting with Philippine Officials, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/09/statement-by-nsc-spokesperson-emily-horne-on-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-meeting-with-philippine-officials/>

³⁴ Secretary Antony J Blinken and Philippine Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Before Their Meeting, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-and-philippine-foreign-secretary-teodoro-locsin-before-their-meeting/>

³⁵ Readout of Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III's Meeting With Philippine Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2771441/readout-of-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iiis-meeting-with-philippine-sec/>

³⁶ Indian Media Online Briefing, September 30, 2021, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/indian-media-online-briefing>

³⁷ Chief of the Naval Staff to Visit Oman 27-29 September, 2021, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/chief-naval-staff-visit-oman-27-%E2%80%93-29-september-2021>

the visit. The understanding will facilitate information exchange on merchant shipping traffic through India's IFC-IOR and Oman's Maritime Security Centre³⁸. It helps in generating domain awareness of all traffic moving in and out of the critical Persian Gulf region and adds to India's bilateral relationship with the strategically vital Sultanate.



Admiral Karambir Singh, Chief of the Naval Staff, exchanges the White Shipping Memorandum of Understanding with R Adm Saif bin Nasser bin Mohsen Al-Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman at Muscat on September 27, 2021. Source: Indian Navy

India continued with its regional COVID-19 support through Mission Sagar, with INS Savitri delivering two Medical Oxygen Plants to Chittagong³⁹ and INS Airavat delivering 300 Oxygen Concentrators to Sattahip, in Thailand⁴⁰. INS Airavat had also delivered COVID supplies to Indonesia at the end of August.

The Indian Navy and the Republic of Singapore Navy conducted the 28th edition of the annual Singapore India Maritime Bilateral Exercise (SIMBEX) in

³⁸ Signing of MoU on White Shipping Information Exchange Between Indian Navy and Royal Navy of Oman, September 27, 2021,

<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1758612>

³⁹ Mission SAGAR – INS Savitri Arrives at Chittagong,

<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1751481>

⁴⁰ Mission SAGAR – INS Airavat Arrives at Thailand with COVID Relief Supplies,

<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1751779>

the South China Sea from September 02 – 04⁴¹. India fielded IN ships Ranvijay, Kiltan and Kora along with a P-8I maritime patrol aircraft, while Singapore fielded RNS Steadfast, RNS Vigour, a submarine, a Fokker-50 maritime patrol aircraft and four F-16 C/D fighters. Singapore's location, at the mouth of the Malacca choke-point, as well as its developed economy, make it an important maritime partner.

Special Forces from the US, Indian and Japanese navies completed the special operations forces phase of Exercise Malabar 2021 in Santa Rita, Guam, on September 5⁴². This two-week phase focused on interoperability, information sharing and practicing high-end tactics, including fast-rope, combat dive operations, maritime strike warfare, explosive ordnance disposal expert exchanges, VBSS drills and close-quarters battle simulations.

The 4th edition of Exercise AUSINDEX was conducted from 06 -10 September⁴³. Participating units included IN Ships Shivalik and Kadmat and HMAS Warramunga, all three of which had also participated in Exercise Malabar off Guam in August, as well as HMAS Rankin, an Australian Collins-class submarine, and RAAF P-8A and F-18 aircraft. The exercise helps in building interoperability across the range of naval operations, involving the surface, air and underwater dimensions. It is indicative of the substantial enhancement of the bilateral relationship.

IN Ships Shivalik and Kadmat also participated in the 3rd edition of Exercise Samudra Shakti with the Indonesian Navy off the approaches to the Sunda Straits from September 20-22⁴⁴. KRI Bung Tomo and KRI Malahayati represented the Indonesian Navy. Air elements participating in the exercise included a P-8I from the IN, and CN-235 reconnaissance aircraft from the Indonesian Navy. The exercise focused on predominantly on surface operations, with an element of cross-deck landings and air defence exercises.

On the Western sea board, INS Tabar, returning from a 20,000 nm+ deployment to the Mediterranean, North Sea and the Baltic, exercised with ENS Alexandria,

⁴¹ Singapore and Indian Navies Conclude Annual Singapore – India Maritime Bilateral Exercise (SIMBEX), https://www.mindef.gov.sg/web/portal/mindef/news-and-events/latest-releases/article-detail/2021/September/04sep21_nr

⁴² NSW Wraps UP SOF Phase of Malabar with Partners Nations, <https://www.c7f.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/2769964/nsw-wraps-up-sof-phase-of-malabar-with-partner-nations/>

⁴³ Royal Australian Navy and Indian Navy Commence Bilateral Exercise – 'AUSINDEX', <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/royal-australian-navy-and-indian-navy-commences-bilateral-exercise-%E2%80%93%E2%80%99ausindex%E2%80%99>

⁴⁴ Indian Navy and Indonesian Navy Participate in Exercise 'Samudra Shakti', <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1756478>

from the Egyptian Navy, on September 05⁴⁵. She was thereafter mission deployed off the Arabian Peninsula⁴⁶ for patrol duties, enabling maintenance of continuous presence in the region.



INS Tabar and ENS Alexandria exercise in the Mediterranean, September 05, 2021.
Source: Indian Navy

USS Benfold conducted a Freedom of Navigation Operation (FONOP) off Mischief Reef on September 08⁴⁷. China claimed that its Southern Theatre Command had warned off the US destroyer, that it has indisputable sovereignty over the South China Sea islands and that the operation proves that the US is an out-and-out “security risk maker in the South China Sea and the biggest destroyer of peace and stability in the region”⁴⁸. The 7th Fleet statement describes the PRC’s statement about the mission as false, highlights that USS Benfold conducted this FONOP in accordance with international law and then continued on to conduct normal operations in international waters. It describes the PLA (N) statement as “the latest in a long string of PRC actions to misrepresent lawful US maritime operations and assert its excessive and

⁴⁵ INS Tabar Conducts Maritime Partnership Exercise with Egyptian Navy, <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/ins-tabar-conducts-maritime-partnership-exercise-egyptian-navy>

⁴⁶ Mission Deployed – INS Tabar, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1756993>

⁴⁷ 7th Fleet conducts Freedom of Navigation Operation, <https://www.c7f.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/2766757/7th-fleet-conducts-freedom-of-navigation-operation/>

⁴⁸ Chinese military warns off US warship trespassing into China’s territorial waters, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-09/08/content_10087486.htm

illegitimate maritime claims at the expense of its Southeast Asian neighbours in the South China Sea". The war of words will continue, with China seeking to obfuscate the issues in pursuit of its "indisputable claim" despite the fact that most regional stakeholders and maritime nations have disputed it.

USS Barry carried out a routine transit of the Taiwan Straits on September 17⁴⁹. HMS Richmond did the same on passage from Japan to Vietnam on September 27, the first transit of the Taiwan Strait by a British warship since 2018⁵⁰. The RN thus joined Canadian, French and Australian navies in having supported the US position and made a warship transit through the Taiwan Strait in recent times. The choice of route was obviously deliberate; there would have been no appreciable difference in the distance covered by HMS Richmond whether she went East or West of Taiwan. A Chinese military spokesman said that "such ill-intentioned behaviour undermines peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and fully exposes its (British) speculative mentality"⁵¹. It is notable that this transit occurred after the announcement of AUKUS. Here too, the war of words will continue, with UK having made its intentions known, but neither side appears ready to escalate so far.

Captain Ian Feasey assumed command of HMS Queen Elizabeth at Guam on September 24, relieving Captain Angus Essenhigh who will take over as the Commander of the HMS Prince of Wales Carrier Strike Group on promotion early next year⁵².

China continued its coercive activity off Taiwan, with 19 PLA aircraft intruding into Taiwan's Southwestern ADIZ on September 5⁵³ and the PLA conducting joint patrols and drills involving warships, AEW aircraft and bombers on September 17⁵⁴. The USS Carl Vinson and HMS Queen Elizabeth Strike Groups remained in the region, conducting exercises with other navies.

⁴⁹ 7th Fleet Destroyer Transits Taiwan Strait, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/Press-Releases/display-pressreleases/Article/2780109/7th-fleet-destroyer-transits-taiwan-strait/>

⁵⁰ UK sends warship through Taiwan strait for first time in more than a decade, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/sep/28/uk-sends-warship-through-taiwan-straight-for-first-time-in-more-than-a-decade>

⁵¹ Chinese Military Opposes British Warship's Sailing Through Taiwan Strait, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2021-09/27/content_4895626.htm

⁵² Royal Navy Flagship Welcomes New Captain, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2021/september/24/210924-qnlz-co-change>

⁵³ Air Activities in the Southwestern ADIZ of R.O.C., <https://www.mnd.gov.tw/english/Publish.aspx?title=News%20Channel&SelectStyle=Military%20News%20Update%20&p=79037>

⁵⁴ PLA Conducts Joint Patrol and Drills in Southwest of Taiwan Island, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2021-09/18/content_4895210.htm



Delhi Policy Group
Core 5A, 1st Floor,
India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road
New Delhi - 110003
India

www.delhipolicygroup.org