From the Editor’s Desk

May has been a month for Indo-Pacific summits as the Ukraine conflict is unfolding. The first US-ASEAN Special summit was held in the US on May 12-13 and both nations committed to establishing a US-ASEAN Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. The major highlight was the Second in-person Quad leaders’ summit held in Tokyo, Japan on May 24 wherein, the US launched the long-awaited Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). The leaders of the Quad countries aimed at strengthening cooperation in wide-ranging domains and launching security initiatives in the maritime domain. Prime Minister Narendra Modi also held bilateral talks with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida to reiterate their cooperation in a free and open Indo-Pacific, as well as in joint initiatives in third countries, like Sri Lanka. Furthermore, new leaders assumed office in important Indo-Pacific powers – such as Anthony Albanese in Australia and Ferdinand Marcos Jr in the Philippines – raising questions as to how regional geopolitics may change.

This month we present to you specially selected opinions and cherry-picks covering all this and more. Do check out our Social Media corner for some engaging and insightful content and interviews and podcasts from eminent experts.

Jai Hind

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PEEP-IN

As QUAD Bets Big On Indo-Pacific, Here’s How Summit Success Challenges China’s Status Quo

Read on more about it at: -

QUOTE

“The QUAD is pursuing a constructive agenda for the Indo-Pacific region. This will further cement QUAD’s image as the force for good.”

– Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi
Quad Summit Indicates Growing Strength

Source: Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, ORF

Never The leaders of the Quad just completed their fourth meeting, and the second in-person gathering, in Tokyo. That the Quad leaders have managed to hold four summits in the last year speaks clearly to the strong commitment shown by the four countries to the grouping. Remarkably, new Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese had barely taken his oath of office before traveling to Japan for the Quad Summit, demonstrating the continued Australian commitment to the Quad despite the Labor Party coming to power in Canberra after nearly a decade of Coalition rule.

The resulting joint statement after the meeting highlighted the importance of the Quad as a “force for good,” with a positive agenda to make the Indo-Pacific region more resilient in the face of myriad challenges.

The resulting joint statement after the meeting highlighted the importance of the Quad as a “force for good,” with a positive agenda to make the Indo-Pacific region more resilient in the face of myriad challenges.

The Ukraine conflict figured prominently in the Quad leaders’ discussions despite the fact that India stands out among them in not calling out Russia by name or joining the Quad countries in sanctioning Moscow. Nevertheless, the joint statement emphasized the importance of rule of law, sovereignty, and territorial integrity; peaceful settlement of disputes without threat or use of force; and freedom of navigation and overflight. The leaders reaffirmed their determination to “uphold the international rules-based order where countries are free from all forms of military, economic and political coercion,” which is particularly applicable in the Indo-Pacific. The leaders also noted that what happened in Ukraine should not be allowed to happen in the Indo-Pacific. Thus, indirectly at least, New Delhi did demonstrate its unhappiness with Moscow’s war.

The connection between what was happening in Europe and the emerging confrontation in the Indo-Pacific was also made abundantly clear when a joint Russian-Chinese force of bombers decided to do a fly-past near Japanese territory during the summit.

The Quad countries also recognized the important role of maritime domain awareness (MDA) in order to be able to respond to a number of challenges, including natural disasters and illegal fishing. The new Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) is useful in this regard, but its relevance to monitoring China’s naval activities is especially significant. The joint statement noted that the IPMDA will “support and work in consultation with Indo-Pacific nations and regional information fusion centers in the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands by providing technology and training to support enhanced,
shared maritime domain awareness to promote stability and prosperity in our seas and oceans.” This is truly bringing the varied capabilities of the Quad together to help the entire region deal with a particularly insidious form of Chinese aggression: Beijing’s strategy of sending seemingly civilian fishing vessels to act as an extension of the PLA Navy in the maritime domains of various countries. This Quad initiative was much needed and should help the region recognize China’s covert aggression.

Maritime security and compliance with international law, especially the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), plus maintenance of freedom of navigation and overflight in order to maintain a maritime rules-based order, including in the East and South China Seas, were big on the Quad agenda. The leaders reaffirmed their opposition to “any coercive, provocative or unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo and increase tensions in the area, such as the militarization of disputed features, the dangerous use of coast guard vessels and maritime militia, and efforts to disrupt other countries’ offshore resource exploitation activities.” It would definitely help if the United States, the key Quad power, also joined UNCLOS, of course.

The Quad leaders also emphasized the importance of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), which is demonstrated in the establishment of the “Quad Partnership on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) in the Indo-Pacific.” This is particularly important given that the region is prone to natural disasters of increasing severity. The Quad, in its first iteration, took shape in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami that struck the Indian Ocean region. Working with the Pacific Island nations in strengthening their economic well-being, health infrastructure, environmental resilience, and maritime security capabilities also figured prominently in the Quad joint statement.

Critical and emerging technologies, as well as space, featured prominently in the joint statement too, with the four countries agreeing to explore ways to share space-based Earth observation data, along with a “Quad Satellite Data Portal” that would aggregate links between the national satellite data generated by the Quad partners.

Despite the advances that the Quad is making in working together, their recent focus on non-traditional security issues — presumably at New Delhi’s insistence, considering the other three are already deeply intertwined security partners — is potentially troublesome. Admittedly, some of these are thinly-veiled security cooperation, or could quickly be escalated to security cooperation, but the reluctance to move further on direct security cooperation is difficult to understand. Hopefully, that will be next step for the Quad.

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Black Ships, the Quad and Space

Source: Philip Citowicki, The interpreter

The new initiative will aim to identify so-called “black ships”, those vessels that turn-off usual tracking transponders to engage in illicit activity such as illegal fishing, smuggling or piracy (Les Chatfield/Flickr)

The first in-person leaders’ summit of the Quad in Washington in September last year, the four member countries came forward with an ambitious space agenda. A working group was giving the task of advancing a number of key strategic areas, including the exchange of satellite data with the ambition to “protect the earth and its waters”.

Little progress on space matters was obvious in the public domain in the months following, until in the lead-up to the second in-person leaders’ summit in Tokyo this week the Financial Times reported that a new maritime initiative would emerge from the gathering. The initiative would look to curb illegal fishing in the Indo-Pacific by using satellite technology to connect existing systems in the region to create a comprehensive tracking system. A US official stated that “China was responsible for 95 per cent of illegal fishing in the region”.

The Quad Leaders’ Tokyo Summit Fact Sheet details this new Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA), “a near-real-time, integrated, and cost-effective maritime domain awareness picture”. It will look to harness commercially available data using existing technologies such as radio-frequency technologies. The Fact Sheet notes that due to its commercial origin, data will be unclassified, allowing the Quad to provide it to a wide range of partners who wish to benefit.

One aim will be to identify so-called “black ships”, those vessels that turn-off usual tracking transponders to engage in illicit activity such as illegal fishing, smuggling or piracy. Fishing fleets from China in particular have increasingly troubled countries in the Indo-Pacific and similarly plundered waters around the world. In March 2021, Chinese fishing vessels were found anchored in the Philippines’ exclusive economic zone and in one instance had rammed and sunk a Filipino fishing vessel. Sparking outrage from Ecuador, Chinese fleets have and been tracked to as far as the Galapagos and also stand accused of using “football stadium-style lighting” to plunder fisheries in shared waters between North Korea, Japan, and Russia.

The proliferation of earth observation and reconnaissance satellites make it now viable to track vessels that have turned off their transponders. As of 2022, there is an estimated to be about 5,700 operating satellites in space, with more are coming. In just the last year, more than 1,700 spacecraft and satellites went into orbit via 133 successful launches.

The IPMDA initiative would provide both environmental and security benefits to the region. Identifying China’s fleets would assist in levying faster attribution to their actions – it would support

It would support the region in pushing back against the grey-zone incursions into foreign waters and the bullying of local fishing vessels.
the region in pushing back against the grey-zone incursions into foreign waters and the bullying of local fishing vessels. Chinese ships have even been found not to be engaging in fishing, but instead encouraged financially to operate alongside Chinese law enforcement and military vessels to achieve political objectives in disputed waters.

The IPMDA should be strongly welcomed. It provides a substantive and a tangible action beyond the plethora of verbal commitments that emerge from other forums. It also builds on a bilateral agreement made by Quad member countries — it could also provide an avenue for integration with other countries interested in engaging with the Quad.

Another initiative announced at the Tokyo meeting was the opening of a “Quad Satellite Data Portal” that will look to aggregate links to respective national satellite data resources which can support efforts to build disaster resilience against the challenges posed by climate change.

However, the Quad can do more in the space realm. An opportunity exists to act on its commitment to “consult on norms and guidelines” for space and establish a Quad commitment to ban anti-satellite tests — as unilaterally announced by the United States in April this year. This kind of commitment would support discussions at a new UN Open Ended Working Group that seek to develop new norms for behaviour in space. Such a commitment by the Quad would show the value of “minilateral” mediums which are less constricted than larger groupings.

The biggest announcement from President Joe Biden’s trip to Asia may be the one that got the least attention. The Quad, a grouping consisting of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States, has just announced a maritime domain awareness partnership that will provide a new stream of data from commercial satellites to countries across the Indo-Pacific. This is a substantial addition to the Quad’s agenda and one of its most promising initiatives to date. Critically, it satisfies the desire of most regional partners for the Quad to provide public goods and address the needs of smaller states in the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands. If properly executed, this effort could be a flagship project for demonstrating the Quad’s value to regional countries.

Today, regional states monitor maritime activity mainly through legacy technologies from the last century: coastal radars, aerial and surface patrols, and broadcasts from automatic identification system (AIS) transponders whose primary purpose is vessel tracking for collision avoidance, not detecting illicit behavior. Some states also require licensed fishing ships to be equipped with vessel monitoring system (VMS)
transponders. Both systems relay identifying data, position, course, and speed by sending signals from transceivers on ships to nearby vessels and receiving stations, both on shore and in space.

But AIS is only legally mandated on vessels over 300 tons operating in international waters. And VMS adoption is uneven. Most ships, including fishing boats, across the world’s oceans are under no obligation to operate either system. And even those that do can easily turn off or spoof the systems if they want to engage in illicit activity. That leaves regional law enforcement and navies reliant on coastal radar, which drops off rapidly farther from shore, or planes and ships, which are expensive and highly inefficient ways to monitor the vast waters of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Maritime domain awareness in the region therefore remains patchy and enforcement resembles a game of whack-a-mole in which badly outnumbered and overworked patrol vessels attempt to catch illicit operators.

Thankfully, space-based systems are beginning to present 21st-century solutions to these problems. In addition to space-based AIS and VMS receivers, many commercial satellites carry electro-optical as well as synthetic aperture radar sensors to image the planet’s surface. The price of satellite data is plummeting as companies move from relying primarily on large and expensive satellites in geosynchronous orbit to constellations of small and cheap satellites in low-earth orbit. Despite the rapidly diminishing costs of space-based remote sensing, collection at the scale necessary for persistent monitoring of vast exclusive economic zones is still too expensive for most developing states in the Indo-Pacific.

As in so many fields, the problem of maritime domain awareness is now as much about data processing capacity as data collection. There is too much remote sensing data available through both government and commercial providers for manual analysis. Automation and machine learning are necessary to rapidly flag suspicious behavior from diverse data sources, task more detailed remote sensing collection to identify illicit actors and get that information to relevant agencies for tracking and potential interdiction. This is particularly challenging for countries that lack the systems necessary to efficiently process and distribute the resulting data.

The greatest hurdle to effective use of remote sensing data for maritime domain awareness remains scale. The Indian and Pacific Oceans are vast — too large to effectively patrol by air or sea, too expensive to image consistently by satellite. The problem for imaging satellites is the inverse relationship between resolution and aperture. Sensors, whether in the electro-optical or radar bands, that provide enough detail about a vessel to be useful in identification also collect over a relatively small area at a time. In other words, cameras must be focused on a small area to get the highest resolution images. That makes persistent monitoring of empty oceans by imaging satellites prohibitively expensive.

The best solution is what the industry refers to as “tipping and cueing” — using a sensor that can cover a large geographic area with lower fidelity for an initial collection, and then following up with a higher-resolution sensor to check on any suspicious activity. Satellites that track radio frequency data are a promising option for that first pass, and for some purposes
collect sufficient data all by themselves. That is because almost every ship on the ocean sends out radio signals. Even illicit actors that may turn off or spoof AIS are still likely to be using very high frequency radios, X-band radars, and other systems. And with the right sensors, a satellite can collect and geolocate those signals over a relatively wide area.

One leading commercial operator on that front is U.S.-based HawkEye360, whose data the Quad members plan to purchase and share with partners across the region. This will be used to determine illicit actors’ patterns of behavior, task other satellites, and allow for more effective patrol and interdiction operations. The Quad will also help process and rapidly distribute this data through existing channels. These includes the U.S. Navy’s SeaVision platform, which is used by nearly every partner in the region, as well as India’s Indian Ocean Region Information Fusion Centre, Singapore’s Information Fusion Centre, the Australia-sponsored Pacific Fusion Centre in Vanuatu, and the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency’s Regional Fisheries Surveillance Center in the Solomon Islands. This effort addresses a real need across Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean region, and the Pacific Islands.

For several years, countries in Southeast Asia in particular have been asking the Quad to deliver public goods for them. The Quad vaccine initiative was welcomed but has been too slowly implemented. The same is true of the Quad’s commitment to regional infrastructure. And efforts to focus on supply chain security have bypassed much of the rest of the region. Questions have therefore been raised about the Quad’s ability to deliver value for neighbors in the Indo-Pacific.

Dhruva Jaishankar and Tanvi Madan have recently noted that “the Quad must develop a more robust security agenda if it seeks to sustain itself — and the region — in the coming years.” Indeed, the Quad is best positioned to deliver on security, which is the area in which the United States, Japan, Australia, and India have most in common. But focusing on security also tends to make much of the region nervous, especially when it means pushing back against China. But the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness smartly addresses several regional concerns. Illegal fishing takes away a vital source of food and income from people across the Indo-Pacific. Smuggling threatens law enforcement efforts across the region. And illicit activities by China’s maritime militia in the South China Sea undermine regional security.

This maritime domain awareness initiative therefore combines public goods provision with the Quad’s natural strengths: security cooperation and capacity building. The United States, Japan, Australia, and India are four of the Indo-Pacific’s leading maritime powers. It is only natural that they would help the region develop greater maritime domain awareness capabilities. That this will highlight China’s illicit activities in the waters of many regional states is certainly a benefit from a strategic standpoint, but it is also an economic boon for the Indo-Pacific’s smallest players the most.

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Forward from the Tokyo Quad Summit and IPEF

Source: Girish Luthra, ORF


A Recap

Of the four Quad summits held thus far in rapid succession, the first and the fourth are of special significance. The maiden summit, conducted virtually in March 2021, under the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic and increased Chinese belligerence, formalised this cooperative arrangement. It recognised that the four countries (Australia, India, Japan, the US) “bring diverse perspectives” but [and] “are united in a shared vision for the free and open Indo-Pacific”. The vision outlined under the ‘Spirit of the Quad’ joint statement aimed to build upon the areas of convergence. Expanding its scope beyond the one contained in the grouping’s original nomenclature ‘The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue’, it sought to make its objectives more broad-based. The new focus was on development-linked initiatives to drive the common good and cooperative security, whilst addressing contemporary geopolitical challenges. The second summit made incremental progress by adding working groups to the three announced after the maiden summit (vaccines, critical and emerging technologies, and climate), and expanding cooperation in a few other areas. The third summit reemphasised the commitment of the four countries to the region.

The fourth summit was held in Tokyo on 24 May 2022, in the backdrop of the ongoing Russia–Ukraine war, and its ramifications. The reality of the two economic shocks in quick succession, another humanitarian crisis soon after the one witnessed in Afghanistan, the looming geopolitical uncertainty, and the parallels being drawn between the situation in Eastern Europe and the Indo-Pacific made this summit much more important and relevant.

The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework and the Quad

A day before the Quad summit, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) was launched by the US President, in the presence of the Prime Ministers of India and Japan. Other than the US, it has 12 participating countries at present, whose nod had been obtained by the US in the run-up to the summit. These countries will undertake “collective discussions towards future negotiations.” The IPEF has been projected as a new age economic arrangement, and not a mere trade facilitation pact that generally aims at rationalising or eliminating tariffs and enabling market access. It seeks to deepen economic engagement amongst partners for “continued growth, peace, and prosperity.” The joint statement indicated that lessons learnt from the pandemic and other developments in the region necessitated a new approach. It highlighted four pillars under this framework: Trade (free, fair, and
inclusive); Supply Chains (diverse, transparent, and secure); Clean Energy, Decarbonisation, and Infrastructure (technologies, finance, connectivity); Tax and Anti-Corruption (for fair competition and common standards). However, from the joint statement, it can be surmised that the IPEF is currently more of a vision statement than a framework, and substantive groundwork will be needed by the participating countries to evolve a comprehensive framework that can be executed on the ground. It would be desirable if the execution part of the framework is enunciated in the coming months, to provide clarity and sustain the momentum.

The IPEF joint statement also invites other Indo-Pacific partners that share “goals, interests and ambition for the region” to join the initiative. However, the US is keen that the current IPEF partners discuss the process and criteria for additional members to join. This aspect could also be included in the revised comprehensive framework. Inevitably, comparisons will be made between the IPEF, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and the Comprehensive Protocol for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CP-TPP), and the promise of IPEF as a new-age economic arrangement must find suitable articulation in terms of delivery. It is not clear if the countries that are already part of RCEP and CP-TPP will need to adapt or transition, and how such an adaptation or transition may be undertaken. The new US Indo-Pacific Strategy released in February 2022 had outlined the plan to launch and lead IPEF. The fact it was launched a day prior and not soon after the Quad summit makes it clear that it is a US-led and not a Quad-led initiative. At the same time, the US is likely to seek strong support from the Quad countries to take the IPEF discussions forward.

**The Tokyo Summit and the Roadmap**

The joint statement issued after the Quad summit in Tokyo on 24 May 2022, is more comprehensive in comparison to the first three summits (the statement after the third meeting in March 2022 had been termed as ‘Joint Readout’). It has endeavoured to bring more clarity to the broad framework for cooperation, by outlining eight specific areas. These include Peace and Stability; COVID-19 and Global Health Security; Infrastructure; Climate; Cybersecurity; Critical and Emerging Technologies; Quad Fellowship; Space; and Maritime Domain Awareness and HADR. The Ukraine war finds mention, but the statement evades the tricky question of finding common grounds to deal with the same. A better mutual understanding is, however, indicated concerning North Korea and Myanmar.

The broad thrust is to move forward on the Quad agenda, without being constrained by specific areas of divergence amongst the Quad countries. Their common position against the militarisation of disputed features, the dangerous use of coastguard vessels and maritime militia, and efforts to disrupt other countries’ offshore resource exploitation activities have been stressed. Increased emphasis
on cooperation with the Pacific Island states has been indicated, which will require urgent action given some recent developments. Quad cooperation with multilateral institutions, and on terrorism and violent extremism are important steps, but specific deliverables will need to be mutually agreed upon.

The broad thrust is to move forward on the Quad agenda, without being constrained by specific areas of divergence amongst the Quad countries. Their common position against the militarisation of disputed features, the dangerous use of coast guard vessels and maritime militia, and efforts to disrupt other countries’ offshore resource exploitation activities have been stressed.

Overall, the joint statement indicates continuity in the broad plan for development-linked cooperative security for the region, through affirmative and constructive initiatives. The progress made by the Quad since its first summit has been covered in the joint statement, conveying that delivery under the Quad banner is beginning to become tangible, and much more can be expected in the coming months. It also sends a message that the salience of the Indo-Pacific region has only gone up due to the current situation in Eastern Europe and that the Quad will be a key partnership in shaping its environment in the coming years.

A comprehensive Quad joint statement and the launch of IPEF are key developments, with long-term implications for the region. There are some common strands between the IPEF and the Quad joint statements, such as infrastructure and climate, and synergy between the Quad and the IPEF on these aspects would be desirable. Understandably, a security framework for the Indo-Pacific region in due course, as a follow-up to the economic framework will be much harder, though it is not inconceivable. It could begin with an Indo-Pacific Maritime Security Cooperation Framework. As and when this path is explored, the role of the Quad will be critical.

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Cherry-Picks of the Month


3. How the Quad can become more than an anti-China grouping - https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/how-the-quad-can-become-more-than-an-anti-china-grouping-7934017/


CAPS Experts In Focus


Interview/View Points

1. Gravitas Tokyo edition - Has the Quad delivered on its promises?, Exclusive Interview with Shinzo Abe - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8aDGN5AuD4

Debates/Panel Discussions

1. President Biden in South Korea and Japan, Speakers : Manjari Chatterjee Miller, Sheila A. Smith, Scott A. Snyder - https://www.cfr.org/event/media-briefing-president-biden-south-korea-and-japan

2. Perspective: QUAD SUMMIT 2022, 24th May, Guests: Deepa Gopalan Wadhwa, Former Ambassador to Japan, Maj Gen (Retd.) Dhruv C. Katoch, Director, India Foundation, Dr Sreeram Chaulia, Foreign Affairs Expert - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcyNrjgwoX4


Podcasts

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