
The QUAD and Future of Indo-Pacific Security

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The US has dominated the blue waters of the world for decades but this era appears to be coming to an end with the rapid rise of the Chinese Navy. China's ability to conduct power projection and amphibious operations around the world will soon become a reality. This will also affect US allies and partners. Tension and a conflict-like situation remains in the South China Sea (SCS) as well in the East China Sea due to island disputes, land reclamation, confrontations, clashes between maritime law enforcement vessels, freedom of navigation operations by the US Navy (USN) and threats from the Chinese Navy. Both China and Taiwan claim almost the entire SCS, and indicate their claims with what is known as the Nine-Dash Line. This claimed boundary virtually overlaps every other country in the region. Former US Secretary of State John Hay wrote in 1900 that the Mediterranean Ocean was the ocean of the past, the Atlantic Ocean the ocean of the present, and the Pacific Ocean the ocean of the future but this can be modified to 'Indo-Pacific Oceans'.

Modi's Vision for the Indo-Pacific

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has indicated a maritime vision for the Indian-Pacific region and the concept of Indo-Pacific security. He is convinced that India's development depends upon the freedom of the

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sea lanes of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. In his policy of not only ‘Look East but also Act East’, he has reached out to other maritime nations in the region like Japan, the US and Australia. He is also trying to strengthen ties with all associations and symposiums of the region like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and East Asia Summit (EAS). In his quest for maritime security and development of the Asia-Pacific region, he has not neglected the small island nations like Maldives, Mauritius and Seychelles in the Indian Ocean; and Fiji and other islands in the South Pacific. He has been backing up his support with financial assistance but it cannot match the deep pockets of China, thus, it is very important for India to grow economically. The Prime Minister has also been dwelling on India’s concerns over China’s shadow over the South China Sea. The recent initiatives taken by India have further strengthened the maritime ties with Japan, Australia and the US, an overview of which is given below.

The key operative words in this context are ‘strategic partnership and security in the broader Indian Ocean Region (IOR)’. This specifically implies maritime cooperation with India on a long-term basis. It was clear that the economic and security interests of the US were linked with the developments in the region, extending from the Western Pacific, East Asia into the IOR and South Asia. Since the 1990s, India and the US have been taking baby steps towards each other to establish a framework for defence cooperation. In January 1995, the Agreed Minutes on Defence Relations between India and the US was signed. The rapidly evolving geopolitical environment resulted in both countries signing the ‘New Framework for Defence Cooperation’, on June 28, 2005, followed by the ‘Disaster Relief Initiative’ in 2005 and the ‘Maritime Security Cooperation Framework in 2006’. The Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) which was launched in 2012, is an unprecedented joint endeavour that brings sustained leadership focus to the bilateral defence

trade relationship, creates opportunities for US-India co-production and co-development, and fosters more sophisticated science and technology cooperation, while ensuring that bureaucratic processes and procedures do not stand in the way of progress. The year 2014 saw the endorsement of the India-US Declaration on Defence Cooperation, by the President of the US and India's former Prime Minister; a document that reflects the commitment of the US and India to a long-term strategic partnership, through which both countries will cooperate to increase the security and prosperity of their citizens and the global community at large.

During 2015, President Obama was the chief guest at India's 66th Republic Day celebrations. The visit resulted in several key defence outcomes, including the completion of the 2015 Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship, which will guide and expand both the nations' bilateral defence and strategic partnership over the next 10 years; an agreement to pursue four pathfinder projects under the DTTI as well as cooperation on aircraft carriers and jet engine technology; and a Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region, which affirms the shared vision for promising prosperity and stability in the region. Prime Narendra Modi said it all when he stated, "We have to convert a good start into lasting progress. This requires translating our vision into sustained action and concrete achievements." Maritime cooperation with the US has moved faster than cooperation with the other two Services. The Indo-US framework for Maritime Security Cooperation involves both countries committing themselves to comprehensive cooperation in ensuring a secure maritime domain, which would include protection of free flow of commerce and to counter a whole range of threats that could undermine maritime security. It includes initiatives undertaken by the International Maritime Organisation and other relevant UN programmes.

Exercise Malabar

The Indian Navy (IN) has been conducting four types of exercises with the US Navy, out of which the Malabar Exercise has the highest visibility. The Malabar series of exercises began in 1992 and involve diverse naval activities, including aircraft carrier operations, maritime interdiction, etc. Three exercises were conducted prior to 1998, when the US suspended them due to India carrying out the nuclear tests. They were resumed after the 9/11 attacks in 2002. The ninth edition of the exercise in 2007 wherein the scope of the partnership was increased, had the Navies from India, US, Japan, Australia and Singapore participating in the exercise. China was unhappy at the conduct of such a large scale exercise, and perceived it as ganging up against it, thus, causing this initiative to lose steam, since both Australia and New Delhi felt it unwise to provoke China. On January 26, 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Obama agreed to upgrade Exercise Malabar to make it multilateral. However, there are many impediments in the pursuance of maritime cooperation. One of the primary ones is that India has been traditionally following a policy of ‘strategic autonomy’, which makes it difficult to become very close to the US. The three agreements—Logistics Support Agreement (LSA), Communications Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA) and Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geospatial Cooperation (BECA)—are considered the key agreements which the US signs (almost mandatory) with countries with which it has close military ties. After considerable delay, India and the US signed the LSA on August 29, 2016.

India-Japan Maritime Cooperation

Japan’s interest in the IOR is because of the trade routes including to the Middle East oil; the Red Sea path to Europe and North Africa; the declining US security dominance; the Chinese entry into the IOR; terrorism; piracy; and disaster relief. It also believes that India’s military

power can support Japan's security interests and the key one is that Indian naval power can somewhat counter-balance China's growing naval power. Above all this, India is the largest democracy, a large source of manpower, has strong economic growth and a geopolitically important location in the centre of the Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs) in the Indian Ocean-Pacific Region. India's relations with Japan are very old due to the spread of Buddhism through China and Korea. The most popular infrastructure project to have been funded by Japan is the Delhi Metro. The year 2007 was declared as the "India-Japan Friendship Year". This was a prelude to cooperation in defence and security related issues. The process started with a 'Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation between India and Japan' on October 22, 2008 between former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and the then Prime Minister of Japan, Taro Aso, that covered a vast range of activities.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, in an earlier tenure, had propagated a doctrine of "confluence of two seas" and synergy among "maritime democracies" in Asia. India and Japan have been gradually building on it by participating in each other's maritime think-tanks, the Indian and Japanese Navies jointly participating in multilateral exercises (Malabar series) and the bilateral exercise (JIMEX12). Another Japanese initiative has been the multilateral effort of bringing international Coast Guards together through the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP). In 2014, the Japanese government promulgated a new defence export policy, lifting bans that had been in place for nearly thirty years. This offers huge opportunities for Indo-Japan defence industrial cooperation.

Recent Developments

The level of strategic convergence between Delhi and Tokyo can be gauged from the fact in 2014, India invited the Japanese Navy to participate in the annual Malabar Exercise with the US Navy. This was

a significant move considering the fact that India had earlier capitulated to China's reservations about India carrying out multilateral exercises. With the coming of the Modi government, Japan's participation in the Malabar Exercise has been institutionalised. Both Japan and the US have repeatedly expressed their desire to expand the scope of the Malabar Exercise. During the seventh round of the trilateral strategic dialogue held in Honolulu, in June 2015, India agreed to Tokyo's participation in the 2015 series of the Malabar Exercises. Maritime cooperation under Modi and Abe has progressed in a very visible manner. Abe talked about a "free and open Indo-Pacific strategy" and Modi welcomed Japan's deepening engagements under this strategy. Abe said it all earlier when he stated, "The aim should be that sooner rather than later, Japan's Navy and the IN are seamlessly interconnected." India's and Japan's concerns and opportunities converge in the Indian Ocean and outward into the larger Indo-Pacific. Its reach in the Indian Ocean Region and cooperation with Japan provides India an opportunity to cast its footprint on the Indo-Pacific region.

India-Australia Maritime Cooperation

India and Australia are members of the Commonwealth of Nations. They have a lingual (English) connection and sporting ties due to cricket. Both nations are founding members of the United Nations, and members of regional organisations, including the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IORAC) and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). In 2016, under Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, Australia opened the doors for uranium exports to India. Australia has also been traditionally supporting India's position on Arunachal Pradesh against China. India and Australia have a long history of military relations, going back before independence when Indian soldiers fought alongside Australian soldiers in a number of campaigns, including both World Wars—15,000 Indian soldiers fought with the Australians at Gallipoli.

The framework for security cooperation between India and Australia was formalised during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Australia from November 16-18, 2014. Both Prime Ministers reaffirmed that the strategic partnership between India and Australia is based on converging political, economic and strategic interests; a shared desire to promote regional and global peace, security and prosperity; and a commitment to democracy, freedom, human rights, and the rule of law. They, thus, decided to establish a Framework for Security Cooperation to reflect the deepening and expanding security and defence engagement between India and Australia, and to intensify cooperation and consultation between them in areas of mutual interest. The framework was to be implemented in accordance with an action plan which broadly involved periodic meetings at the level of Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Defence Minister; Service-to-Service engagement, including regular high-level visits, annual staff talks, joint training and regular exercises; bilateral maritime exercises; humanitarian assistance and disaster relief; cooperation in defence research and development; annual Joint Working Group meeting on counter-terrorism and other transnational crimes.

While addressing the Australian Parliament during his visit, Modi called for doubling down on maritime cooperation. He said that Australia and India share “a natural partnership,” both are dependent on the oceans as “lifelines,” and harbour growing concern about “access and security.” In perhaps a thinly veiled reference to China’s maritime coercion, he pointed out that some countries are still stuck in the “18th century” mindset, engaging in “encroachments” on other’s territory. Prime Minister of Australia Malcolm Turnbull visited India from April 9-12, 2017. He and Narendra Modi, in a joint statement, said that they are committed to deepening the bilateral defence and security partnership and welcomed the significant progress achieved through the bilateral Framework for Security Cooperation agreed in 2014. India and Australia also inked six pacts, including one aimed at boosting counter-terrorism cooperation,

which the Union Cabinet, chaired by Modi, gave approval to on May 17, 2017. While Modi noted that Australia was ready to supply uranium to India, Turnbull said his government was looking forward to exporting uranium to India “as soon as possible“. It will now depend upon Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Asia-Pacific vision, which will interpret the contours and dimensions of the Quadrilateral Initiative (QUAD).

The Quadrilateral Initiative

The QUAD was the brainchild of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe which he unfurled in 2007 with the support of the US (Vice President Dick Cheney), Australia (Prime Minister John Howard) and India (Prime Minister Manmohan Singh). It was named Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD), which was formatted to be an informal strategic dialogue platform among the member countries. To underscore the synergy of the QSD, a large-scale joint naval exercise called Malabar was also held. The QSD was widely interpreted as a diplomatic and military counter to China’s growing economic and military power. As expected, the Chinese government reacted strongly by lodging a formal protest with all the members of the QSD. The QSD faded away when Australia withdrew from it due to the growing tension between the US and China in the Asia-Pacific, and the growing contradictions in Australia’s approach to it. Julia Gillard became Prime Minister in 2010 and upscaled Australia’s military cooperation with the US. Meanwhile, India, Japan, and the US continued to hold joint naval exercises through Malabar, with Japan becoming a permanent member in 2015.

Revival of QSD

Japan revived the four-way dialogue with India, Australia and the US on the side-lines of the East Asia Summit in the Philippines held from November 13-14, 2017, with the hope that a revived QUAD would once again strive to counter Chinese naval and economic power in Asia. In

New Delhi, it was viewed as India injecting fresh energy into the defence ties with Japan, Australia and the US. The Indian policy-makers are also ready to accept the opening of a democratic security-alliance in Asia. Apart from the military dimension, it is hoped that there will be an economic alliance to counter the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono told the media on November 15, 2017, that the idea of the QUAD is for the leaders of the four nations to promote free trade and defence cooperation across a stretch of ocean from the SCS, across the Indian Ocean and all the way to Africa. It was aimed at countering China's aggressive maritime expansion under its BRI. China's plans would cement a sphere of influence for Beijing well beyond Asia. Kono also said that he had discussed the matter with US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop in August on the side-lines of a Foreign Ministers meeting in Manila. The response of the US came through Alice Wells, Washington's Acting Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia. While accompanying Tillerson on a visit to India on October 28, 2017, she said that Washington was "looking at a working level Quadrilateral meeting in the near term. The Quadrilateral that the Japanese Foreign Minister discussed would be building on a very productive trilateral we have with India and Japan." Wells rejected the idea that the forum would be aimed at containing China. She said it would seek to coordinate alternatives for nations seeking investment in infrastructure and economic development, that don't include predatory financing or unsustainable debt. "It's hard to see a meeting of diplomats from four countries as a plan to contain China," she said. "It's a natural progression and convergence of interests between democratic countries in the Indo-Pacific region."

The revived QSD has germinated and the credit must be given to Admiral Michael G. Mullen, the former US Navy's Chief of Naval Operations. He gave the idea in 2005, when he asked the world's maritime nations to raise what he called a "thousand-ship navy" to provide for

the security of the maritime domain in the 21st century. India's Malabar Exercise is providing a platform for Asia-Pacific cooperation. India's relations with Japan have become deeper and stronger. Australia has put in a lot of effort in fostering ties with Japan, China, and Indonesia, but it will have to apply the same yardstick while engaging India.

Progress on the QUAD

In spite of continuous good relations with the US, the QUAD is still work in progress due to India's policy of strategic autonomy. Presently, President Trump is preoccupied with North Korea and Iran (the US has withdrawn from the Iran nuclear deal), thus, there is very little movement on the QUAD. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was recently in China for one-to-one informal talks with President Xi Jinping, the formal outcome of which is not known, but the state-run news agency Xinhua has said that the meeting between the two is "going to set a stage for Beijing and New Delhi to further exchange views over long-term and strategic issues and to initiate fresh momentum for future bilateral cooperation." China has also displayed its naval might with a naval exercise in the South China Sea which terminated with live firing in the proximity of Taiwan. Song Zhongping, a former member of the People's Liberation Army's (PLA's) Second Artillery Corps, told the *South China Morning Post* that China is building a plan to resolve the Taiwan issue. Elaborating on it, he said, "The ground force's aviation drills in Fujian, the air force's flying over the 'first island chain' and the *Liaoning* (China's aircraft carrier) full-voyage exercises all indicate that the PLA has a comprehensive battle plan for Taiwan." It will now all depend upon Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Asia-Pacific vision, which will interpret the contours and dimensions of the QUAD.