

## DEEPENING STRATEGIC COMMITMENT

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

The leaders of the Quad in Tokyo. | Photo Credit: AP

The [Quad \(the U.S., India, Japan and Australia\)](#) held its second in-person leaders' summit in Tokyo on May 24. It has emerged stronger and clearer in its strategy and goals for the security and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific. The efforts by the Quad countries should be viewed not only from the prism of the summits, but also from the wider context of international developments and the continuing process of consolidation of the bilateral relations within, especially U.S.-India ties.

This is the second interaction of the Quad leaders held after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. That war has no end in sight. With India abstaining from most anti-Russia voting in multilateral bodies, experts in India worried about the impact of Ukraine on the Indo-Pacific region, particularly U.S.-India ties. Some feared that Prime Minister Narendra Modi would face new and intense pressure in Tokyo from the U.S. to condemn Russia. Others argued that the U.S. understood India's nuanced position on Ukraine and may refocus on China's strategic game in the region.

The latter interpretation proved correct. India and the U.S. agreed to disagree on Ukraine, but showed full readiness to further strengthen the Quad and their bilateral cooperation, which, U.S. President Joe Biden said, he was "committed to making...among the closest we have on Earth." With China, he has moved beyond the traditional U.S. stance of 'strategic ambiguity' and pointedly referred to Ukraine to stress that China's armed action against Taiwan would be unacceptable and attract a military response.

The central driving force of the Quad is to counter China's growing expansionism and belligerence. The grouping's diplomatic device of defining its raison d'être without ever using the word 'China' was best reflected in the 'Quad Joint Leaders' Statement' which reads, "We reaffirm our resolve to uphold the international rules-based order where countries are free from all forms of military, economic and political coercion." Thus, China is not only the glue that holds the Quad together; it is also the fuel that may, through Beijing's bad behaviour in the future, drive the grouping's inner consolidation, as shown by an expanding agenda.

The Quad agenda now covers nine sectors: vaccine partnership and health security, climate action, critical and emerging technologies, cooperation on infrastructure, cyber security, space cooperation, education and people-to-people ties, maritime domain awareness, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. The Quad claims to have established "a positive and practical agenda" in year one; in year two, it will focus on "delivery." This needs to be watched.

Not all commitments have been met. The promise of making available at least one billion COVID-19 vaccine doses to Indo-Pacific countries has fallen short. Excluding what the Quad countries contributed to COVAX, just 25% have been delivered to the region so far. This needs to be expanded rapidly. Meanwhile, Quad experts have begun planning ways to enhance capacity for early detection and monitoring of "new and emerging pathogens with pandemic potential."

On infrastructure, a new commitment was made at Tokyo for the Quad to extend over \$50 billion in investment and assistance to the Indo-Pacific countries over the next five years. While the

focus is on the ASEAN countries and the Pacific Island States, a part of this funding should perhaps reach the Indian Ocean region too, with its touch points in Africa. The Common Statement of Principles on Critical Technology Supply Chains is significant, as it concerns cooperation on semiconductors.

The atmospherics of the summit improved significantly after the launch of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) a day earlier. The joint announcement was made by the Quad, seven ASEAN member-states (excluding Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos), South Korea and New Zealand. The plan is to prepare their economies for the future by conducting negotiations on the pillars of trade; supply chains; tax and anti-corruption and clean energy; decarbonisation and infrastructure. The IPEF is ambitious, but doable.

India's constructive participation in the Tokyo summit and agreement to join IPEF demonstrated commitment to strengthening its strategic partnerships in order to push back China's dominance. At the same time, New Delhi has agreed to the expansion of BRICS membership. This simultaneous engagement with the Quad and BRICS is New Delhi's strategic autonomy in full play. India's presidency of the G20 in 2023 and the likelihood of India hosting the Quad summit in 2024 will ensure that it follows a calibrated policy and stays on track, as every major step will attract international attention.

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