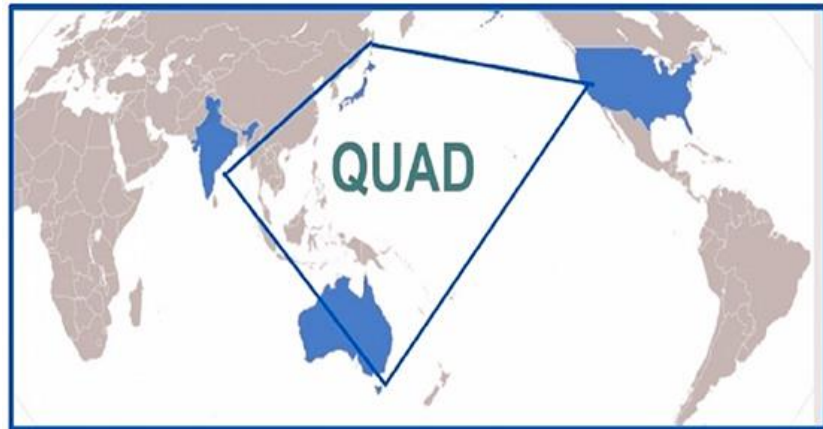


Indo-Pacific: How India is countering China

At a time when the world's attention is focussed on the Ukraine crisis, India, together with its Quad partners, underscored that the real strategic challenge to the world continues to be the destabilizing tendencies of the Chinese Communist Party under President Xi Jinping.

Focus on the Indo-Pacific

1. The Quad foreign ministers' meeting reaffirmed the grouping's commitment to a rules-based global order underlined in the adherence to international law, reflected in the UN Convention on the



- Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) as well as the shared vision of a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific.
2. They reiterated their determination to enhance engagement with regional partners "to strengthen maritime domain awareness, protect their ability to develop offshore resources, and ensure freedom of navigation."
3. The Melbourne meeting was particularly focused on Covid-19 vaccine distribution, countering terrorism and cooperation in maritime security and the climate crisis.

The centrality of Quad

1. For India, this was a moment to, once again, underline the centrality of Quad, once dismissed by many, to the rapidly evolving strategic agenda of the Indo-Pacific.
2. Robust bilateral relations between the Quad countries, their strategic convergences and shared democratic values combined to make Quad a vibrant and substantial framework. Without India's active participation, there won't be any Quad.

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3. The remaining three nations — the US, Japan and Australia — are long-standing alliance partners in the traditional sense.
4. It is India's participation in the Quadrilateral framework that gives this platform a new identity, making it one of the most creative exercises in partnership-building in recent times.
5. It is not surprising that the White House views India as a driving force of Quad and an engine for regional growth.

Retaining voice on key concerns:

1. While trying to find ways to work with its partners as part of the Quad arrangement, India managed to retain its voice on matters which are critical to its larger interests.
2. On Myanmar, it conveyed a message that as an immediate neighbor, New Delhi's concerns and priorities will be different from those far away and so a policy of national sanctions would not be pursued despite the long-term objective of seeking a democratic transition.
3. In Ukraine too, there was a message that India values its ties with Russia and doesn't see the likelihood of an imminent conflict over Ukraine quite as strongly as the West.
4. All this reflects a genuine maturity in the way the Quad relationships are evolving, buttressing the already strong bilateral aspects of the ties.
5. In geography as big and diverse as the Indo-Pacific with hardly any institutional architecture, the platform of Quad opens up several opportunities for larger multilateral engagements, despite protestations from some quarters.

The Philippines: A new partner in Indo-Pacific

1. Jaishankar's visit to the Philippines from the Quad summit also showcased India's willingness to more proactively shape the strategic contours of the Indo-Pacific. This visit came days after Manila agreed to buy three batteries of the BrahMos cruise missile in a \$375-million deal from India.
2. These missiles, to be received by the Philippines Navy by the end of 2022, are being viewed as a major capability booster when the confrontation between Manila and Beijing is only intensifying.

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3. The Philippines is looking to diversify its partners and India is willing to up its game in Southeast Asia.
4. As maritime countries, the Philippines and India, both at the crossroads of the busiest sea lanes in the world, know the critical role of the rule of law in maintaining stability on the water — that most unstable element yet so vital to the life and thriving of nations.

As the churn continues in the Indo-Pacific, the maturing of Quad and New Delhi's attempts to shape the regional environment not only to further its interests but also for wider regional stability are likely to ensure that coercive and aggressive practices of China are leading to a new equilibrium with long-term consequences.