



CSSAME Viewpoints

Prospect for the QUAD: Views from India and Taiwan

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ABOUT

CASSME Viewpoints is newsletter series from Centre for Studies of South Asia and the Middle East (CASSME), National Chung Hsing University, Taiwan. Here, we cover policy issues regarding Taiwan-South Asia relations. The aim is to invite scholars and young researchers from Taiwan and south Asian states to present their views on the current political, economic and social developments and similar issues relevant to Taiwan- South Asia relations.

Each issue aims to inform, create debate and deliver prospective outlooks and policy recommendations. Thus all opinions, statements and thoughts are welcomed and represented. We hope to represent different perspectives related to a special focused theme in each issue, and welcome feedback and suggestions to keep progressing with our initiative.

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HIGHLIGHTS

Executive Summary

Since its revival in 2017, QUAD, i.e., Quadrilateral Security Dialogue has ushered in a new conversation among the Indo-Pacific states. China's assertiveness in the region has not gone unchallenged, and multiple actors have become more vocal and decisive against Beijing's disregard of international order and the rule of law. India, a developing member of the Washington-led grouping, also is slowly and diligently becoming an active participant in maintaining stability and balancing the region's skewed dependence on the economic giant. With the guiding policy of 'Act East,' India approaches QUAD as a platform to gain strategic support, strengthen its maritime strategy, and create channels of trade and commerce with Southeast Asia, East Asia, and the Oceania region, as detailed by journalists Chonkar Kunal. India prefers to weaponize the economy against China's threats to its sovereignty, security, and position in the area than to follow Washington's acts. Questions such as Taiwan sovereignty continue to receive the divided attention (rather inattention) of New Delhi.

Dr. Shen expresses that all the members of QUAD need to contribute to Taiwan's security decisively at this flashpoint. India does not need to overtly self-restrain itself on the matter. Taiwan holds a rich experience in confronting China, and India should understand the specific benefit and value security cooperation with Taiwan brings to the table. Building consensus on crucial issues and standing ground together against Beijing's bullying should be the only way forward for a functioning QUAD.

QUAD: A BULWARK IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

Kunal Chonkar

The Indo-Pacific area has never escaped the scrutiny of international media. Time and again, it has been fallen to the Rashomon effect where nation-states' individual geopolitical and geostrategic interests have produced contested narratives while battling a common challenge. The intense fascination for the Indo-Pacific is partly a derivative of its stronghold over 50 percent of the world trade via sea routes. The existence of the Malacca Strait and South China Sea (SCS) as the world's busiest maritime trade routes is a clear illustration of the massive dependence of Indo-Pacific states on the sea. It seems that the strategic position of these trade routes in the region, on the one hand, generates optimism for economic progress but, on the other, raises security and strategic issues. As observed by the report compiled by the Indonesian Navy's Fleet-I Command and the Indonesian Maritime Security Agency - In addition to more than 70,000 commercial ships of various types, 362 battleships from various countries crossed the narrow water corridors of the Malacca Strait in 2020. The presence of battleships this year, including aircraft carriers belonging to the United States (US), is still intensive in the Strait. It is no secret that China's aggressive ruddering in the SCS has led to the movement of maritime fleets from all waters of the globe to the region.

Here, this article draws attention to the efforts of New Delhi under the Quad mechanism to prevent Beijing from furthering its influence in the Indo-Pacific region. India has shown the intention to deter China's attempts to change the status quo in the region by renewing military and strategic exercises with the regional and international players. However, given the commercial complexities with Beijing, New Delhi considers it unrealistic to promote an all-out economic decoupling from Beijing. It is also thoroughly aware that complete submission to Washington's act of encircling and restraining Beijing comes with risks and ruffles its strategic autonomy. Thus, Indian leadership intends to weaponize trade and commerce against threats to its sovereignty, security, and position in the region as it makes a chair for itself in the new world order.

India and Quad

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), consisted of the US, Japan, India, and Australia, is an informal strategic alliance that challenges Beijing's expansionism in the Indo-Pacific region. China's territorial claims are counterproductive to rule-based order and democratic framework, widely valued in the Quad. Beijing has been threatening New Delhi in the north, but India can muscle a guillotine choke on China in the Indian Ocean, tipping the mainland's energy shipping lanes and container traffic. New Delhi's continental focus on security has emboldened Beijing, whereas the Indian advantage lies in the maritime backyard. Joining the Washington-led Indo-Pacific informal strategic alliance would mean far greater maritime cooperation between India and its counterparts, exposing the chink in Beijing's armor. India's ramping up of maritime offensive and defensive capabilities with support from the Quad partners appears to implement the adage - strong offense is the best defense.

Strategic Support

The second wave of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic not only grappled India, forcing it to turn a majority of its attention inwards but also allowed China with an opportunity to alter the region's topography discreetly. The said changes are seconded by the reports of a Chinese village in Bhutanese territory, a significant road cutting inside Thimphu's border, Beijing's refusal to follow through with the initially planned broader disengagement process with New Delhi, and the continued fortification of PLA troops and camps in the LAC. Thus, New Delhi has now started to galvanize efforts to balance Beijing on internal and external grounds. While the plans to advance domestic policies for economic recovery are set in motion, the leadership is now proactively engaging with neighbors using its 'Act East' policy while sharpening the deterrence using its position in the Quad. The synchronization between the two has assisted India to expand beyond its traditional economic objectives to encompass security and other strategic realms, broaden its horizons from Southeast and Northeast Asia to the entirety of the Indo-Pacific, and hardwire the political will to achieve the set objectives.

Apart from the Quad nations who have rallied their support behind New Delhi, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) concerns' over Beijing's hegemony in the SCS have

also gradually led to support for increased Indian presence in the region. Recently, the ASEAN released a powerful statement against China. On 15 June, in a virtual meeting Defense Ministers from the ASEAN called for the early conclusion of a Code of Conduct (COC) for the SCS. They emphasized 'the need to maintain and promote an environment conducive to the early conclusion of an effective and substantive COC in accordance with international law,' referring to the maritime code of conduct. The SCS has been a critical issue at past ASEAN defense ministers' meetings as well. The latest document reiterated that the nations are committed to 'the maintenance and promotion of peace, security, stability, safety and freedom of navigation in and overflight above the SCS.' They also called for 'self-restraint in the conduct of activities' and urged parties to 'avoid actions that could complicate or escalate the situation' without naming a particular nation.

Maritime Muscle-Flexing

With support from Quad partners and other regional players, India is working on a particular strategy concerning the Malacca Strait. If Beijing continues with its rat bites, New Delhi will not miss the opportunity to target the soft spots. A large part of China's trade is done through the Malacca route. Some 80 percent of its energy needs are fulfilled through this route as its dependence on oil imports from Arab countries. If India blocks the Malacca route, China could face a major setback on the trade front. For some years now, India has been planning to establish a security barrier in the Nicobar Islands [part of Andaman and Nicobar Islands] as it eyes the soft post of the Malacca Strait. At a time when the India-China ties continue to decline, New Delhi endeavors to strengthen its security establishments in the region. In this connection, the naval base in the Nicobar Islands can become the operational headquarters for the Quad, giving the alliance a formal look and expediting its intent.

Nonetheless, through joint military exercises with countries worldwide, New Delhi has convinced the superpowers that India's role in maritime security and trade cannot be ignored. This is also evident by the recent opening of an alternative sea trade route in the SCS by Moscow in collaboration with New Delhi. Also, the defense relations between India, Japan, Australia, and the United States were boosted through the Malabar [in the Bay of Bengal] exercise. India and Japan have also decided in 2019 to launch the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor. an ambitious maritime interconnection initiative between India and Japan. in

response to China's String of Pearls. New Delhi and Tokyo have carried out 15 joint exercises in the SCS over the past three years.

Despite openly ridiculing the joint naval exercise, China realizes that India's renewed maritime security efforts through Quad are a major threat to the country. Thus, the joint naval exercises of the Quad are a direct warning to Beijing. India knows that China does not understand the need for talks or signals of peace and goodwill but gets vexed only over military might.

Weaponizing Trade and Commerce

The first virtual summit between leaders of India, the USA, Australia, and Japan has clearly indicated increased activity on the Quad's economic and commercial fronts. The Quad's ability to change geostrategic politics can impact China's relations with Asian countries, particularly with India.

Since its first official statement on the Indo-Pacific strategy, New Delhi has categorically strayed away from grand diplomatic gestures and nuanced military postures against its largest trading partner in the region. The Indian leadership, in its statement at the Shangri La Dialogue of 2018, carefully tabled its vision of the Indo-Pacific. It said; cooperation but neither 'as a grouping that seeks to dominate' nor the one 'directed against any country.' India believes that economic, commercial, and trade routes have more say than militarily might in mitigating the matter. Thus, New Delhi intends to weaponize trade and commerce as its primary firearms to be used as bargaining tools in the region and international order.

Chinese companies continue to seek economic inroads in India, but Beijing's backstabbing has compelled New Delhi to link sovereignty disputes to economic issues. In light of India banning Chinese apps and telecom companies from participating in domestic projects due to security reasons, the rest of the Quad nations will have to focus on developing new technologies and approaches through which Beijing's dependence on software and hardware can be eliminated. Quad nations are also actively working together to achieve strategic agreements with non-Quad nations to overcome traditional dependence on China. As stated in its Act East approach, India is keen to reap the benefits of the blue economy or ocean

economy. India's trilateral cooperation with Indonesia supported by Australia is a perfect example of a renewed approach. New Delhi has worked with Canberra in expanding its economic and strategic footprint in Jakarta. India appears to utilize the Quad platform at various tracks and levels to approach and affirm its presence in the region. India aims to rise to the economic elevation of China and defend its sovereignty with strategic support from 'like-minded' nations. In order to win hearts in the region, the Indian leadership is putting serious efforts into enhancing commercial and economic partnerships with other Indo-Pacific nations.

New Delhi's efforts have been reciprocated by Washington through its push to strengthen the US treaty alliances in the region. This renewed commitment to 'like-minded' nations in Asia is evident in Washington's proactive outreach to its security partners in the Indo-Pacific.

End Remarks

While India's Asia-Pacific outlook has taken an additional avatar with the ideals of Quad, it can not be said that New Delhi is going to put all its strategies in a Washington-guided framework. Questions such as Taiwan continue to receive the divided attention of the Quad partners, especially India. In locking horns with Beijing, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, Taipei is fast earning the regional flashpoint tag. Since 2019, it has been subject to increasing Chinese aggression, including aircraft intrusions, maritime exercises, information warfare, cyber-attacks, and diplomatic arm twisting. The recent statement by the Communist Party has made Beijing's stand steadfastly clear on the unification of Taiwan with the mainland. Thus, there is a genuine concern that the Chinese whispers are soon to transform into battle formations.

These simmering Cross-Strait tensions have led to Taiwan being a priority issue under the 'free and open' policy charted by Washington, Tokyo, and Canberra, but the same is not reciprocated by the Indian establishment. On the one hand, where US-Japan support delivered a much-needed diplomatic recognition to Taiwan in the G-7, complex trade ties and intricate commercial relations between India and China have been a roadblock in ushering serious attention to Taiwan-India ties. While Washington, Tokyo, and Canberra have

seemingly drawn a line covering Taipei while resetting their ties with Beijing, India maintains a nonchalant approach when it comes to Taiwan.

India's three counter partners of the Quad are correct in reading the signs of things to come; it is now time even for New Delhi to accept the clear and present danger it faces. India can have its approach to addressing the issue, but such questions cannot be brushed under the carpet. The rat bites in the Himalayas and the aggressive rudder across the SCS are part of the same common challenge, requiring a unified and unequivocal response. Thus, the Quad leadership needs a signed Indo-Pacific charter based on the principle of defending the region and its freedom

TAIWAN- INDIA SECURITY COOPERATION UNDER THE QUAD+

Ming Shih Shen

With the continuous expansion of its military and toughening posture, Xi's China has gained many enemies. It promises that a more powerful China will not bully the weak and will never strive for hegemony, but its actions are not where its words are. The stirring Chinese nationalism correlated with an increase in overall national strength has already manifested itself in handling issues pertaining to territorial disputes and sovereignty. Apparently, it is all about China and per its time schedule.

From dredging islands in the South China Sea and violating airspace in Taiwan Strait to economic coercion in Southeast Asia and aggression at the Sino-Indian border, we see a China that knows it has gained a geo-strategic advantage; in an era of passive and retreating the United States. It has not only expanded the strategic influence but also stabilized the Chinese Communist regime and strengthened national self-confidence. China's bold adoption of coercive tactics to create strategic superiorities in this Indo-Pacific arena requires a dedicated collaborative counteraction. A retreat from this situation will only encourage China to manipulate this disputed region step by step.

Reflecting on the ending remarks made by the previous author, The QUAD certainly contributes to Taiwan's security as Chinese intentions in Taiwan Strait stand in contradictions to the very principles and discourse mustered by four nations in the Indo-Pacific. However, Taiwan still not being part of this architecture restricts the nation to strengthen its security only through bilateral cooperation, particularly with the United States or Japan. If we can further strengthen bilateral or multilateral cooperation with India and Australia or other states in QUAD+, it will strengthen Taiwan's security and deter China's threat to the Indo-Pacific.

From the geo-strategic viewpoint, Taiwan is at the core of the first island chain in the Western Pacific. Taiwan's successful invasion by China will break the first island chain. It will also allow it to project power directly at the second island chain and via it to the west coast of the

United States, risking the change in stability and balance of this area. Therefore, supporting Taiwan's military capability to defend the first island chain will add to the QUAD's purpose and its Indo-Pacific strategy. In the past, Taiwan has independently fought against China for more than 70 years. It continuously faced China's bully behavior and unreasonable suppression at both diplomatic and non-diplomatic occasions. The need for support from the Indo-Pacific countries, now, is more crucial than ever. Taiwan holds a rich experience in confronting China, and it is already displayed in its sharp-witted military, psychological, economic, and political policy against China's threat. The case of effective prevention and management of COVID 19 by Taipei is, precisely, a reflection of the administration's understanding of China's internal workings. The 'Taiwan model' of COVID-19 epidemic prevention is a few of many experiences Taiwan is capable of sharing with the Indo-Pacific countries.

Under the guiding light of India's Act East Policy and Taiwan's New Southbound Policy, a solid policy framework has already been created for Taiwan-India cooperation. Since 2016, India has been designated as the critical partner by the Tsai-Ing Wen government of Taiwan. However, because of the China factor, the public exchanges between Taiwan and India are primarily limited to the economic, trade, and cultural aspects; by contrast, the security cooperation and military exchanges are kept out of the public eye and progress slowly. Although most cooperative initiatives between the two democratic nations, to date, have been on trade and investment, they can be further extended to security under QUAD guidance. For example, both parties' intelligence officers and military personnel already participate in language, culture, and academics exchanges, science and technology cooperation, and non-traditional security training. The volatile nature of the Indo-Pacific strategic environment provides an opportunity for Taiwan-India exchanges to deepen the nature of their security ties. Many countries with no formal relations with Taiwan maintain various kinds of military exchange programs; India does not need to overtly self-restrain itself on the matter.

In crude terms, Taiwan's military influence or strategic value is considered less than that of the United States, Japan, and Australia within South Block. In current border conflicts between China and India, the latter has actively sought support from countries including the United States, Japan, and Russia rather than Taiwan. While under its 'multi-aligned' motto, New Delhi has approached the United States and Japan to counterweigh the imbalanced

Chinese presence in the Indian economy, China has done the same by gathering allies in India's neighborhood. Thus, India should also not ignore the island's unique role in counterweighing China from the eastern side. The US has strengthened its relations with Taiwan by selling it the most advanced arms available; India can have its own way. For example, it has not signed an alliance agreement with either United States or Japan but, its security cooperation with them has been more profound than ever. This development increases the potential for the new era of Taiwan-India security cooperation; the need is to specify the benefits and value of such cooperation must be made clear to India. India needs backing from the alliance led by the United States; then, Taiwan should be given space to help and expand cooperation with India under the US lead framework of QUAD+.

Before these opportunities appear, Taiwan should also endeavor to consolidate the existing structure of security cooperation with India, such as military intelligence, national defense technologies, think-tank exchanges, and the academic aspect of the military to create more possibilities for breakthrough cooperation, particularly the exchange of talent with security expertise. In the future, Taiwan should incorporate experts in foreign affairs, national defense, and national security, as well as scholars in fostering Taiwanese talent with a profound understanding of India. This would improve the talent exchange between Taiwan and India and, in turn, boost the outcomes of security cooperation between them.

ABOUT THE CENTER

Established in March 2014, Center for Studies on South Asia and the Middle East aims at promoting studies of both regions in Taiwan, and serving as a platform for exchanges among government think tanks and academic communities. Affiliated with the College of Law and Politics, National Chung Hsing University, the Center organizes academic seminars and conferences regularly and hosts scholars from South Asia and Middle Eastern countries for research. Through the official website (cssame.nchu.edu.tw) and two newsletters (Middle East Weekly and CSSAME Viewpoints), the Center provides updated observations, insightful analyses, and research findings on contemporary politics, economics, and society in South Asia and the Middle East.

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