

TOWARDS SHAPING A FAVOURABLE AND POSITIVE MARITIME ENVIRONMENT IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

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Doctrinal and Strategic Nuances

The methodology of shaping a favourable and positive maritime environment can assume many forms, which can be pursued by three main distinct approaches. The first is via a stand-alone nationalistic approach, the second through alliances, and the third by a grouping of strategic partners working together in a series of cooperative mechanisms. While the first approach singularly serves the national interests of one nation, the second and third serve a mutual aim with the distinct difference that alliances also encompass a collective hard security arrangement based on trust and a firm commitment. The common factor in all three approaches is that while addressing threats, challenges, and risks, they also aim to influence the national policies and outlook of other nations. In the case of the second and third approaches, these threats, challenges, and risks form the core convergency factors, while in case of the first approach they could even form the main conflict factors. The US Joint Doctrine for its Armed Forces covers the doctrinal nuances related to alliances and multinational operations,¹ and states that, “*The ability of the United States and its allies to work together to influence the global environment is fundamental to defeating 21st century threats*”². With respect to the US-Japan alliance, the 2022 Defence of Japan white paper states that, “*The Japan-US Alliance, with the Japan-US Security Arrangements as its core, plays a significant role for peace, stability and prosperity of not only Japan but also the Indo-Pacific region and the international community*”³, and with respect to a free and open Indo-Pacific states that, “*Furthermore, in order to strategically promote multi-faceted and multi-layered defence cooperation based on the vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), the SDF (Self Defence Force) is actively engaged in bilateral training and exercises with allies and friendly nations in the broad Indo-Pacific region.*”⁴ It is evident that nations, especially resident Indo-Pacific nations, the US and its allies, and the QUAD which structure can be considered a mix of allies and strategic partners, are shaping the Indo-Pacific as a free and open maritime domain, which is a major global convergence factor. Bilateral or multilateral maritime exercises form a major part of the convergence and associated working mechanisms,

¹ See *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, Joint Publication 1, 25 March 2013 (Incorporating Change 1 - 12 July 2017), available at https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp1_ch1.pdf

² Ibid, p II-21

³ Defence of Japan 2022, p 19, available at www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w_paper/wp2022/DOJ2022_Digest_EN.pdf

⁴ Ibid, p 22

and enhance *'interoperability'*, which is the contemporary buzzword for ensuring the smooth conduct of exercises and operations. These exercises also include the elements of armed forces other than maritime agencies assigned for operations in the maritime environment. Such multinational operations have generically been placed under the *'Diplomatic Role'* of navies or maritime agencies, also often called *'Naval Diplomacy'* or *'Defence Diplomacy'*. For example, in the case of India, the 2015 updated online version of the Indian Maritime Doctrine places bi/multilateral exercise as a task under the *'Diplomatic Role'* of the Indian Navy (IN).⁵ Though nations and their maritime forces have added *'Naval Diplomacy'* and the associated nuances in their doctrines and strategies, it can be considered *'..... a relatively new phrase covering maritime activity on a spectrum without discontinuities, which range from limited compellent military attack at one extreme, through deterrence to thoroughly amicable operation at the other'*.⁶ This paper seeks to deconstruct the methodology by which nations, alliances and other groupings of like-minded nations are shaping a favourable and positive maritime environment in the Indo-Pacific, in pursuit of strategic aims and interests. Towards this the paper will examine the engagements, especially maritime, of India, US alliances, and the QUAD, as case studies.

India

In May 1998, the IN carried out a Strategic Defence Review (SDR) which identified *'Naval Diplomacy'* as one of the four major roles (the balance three being Sea Based Deterrence, Economic and Energy Security, and Forward Presence).⁷ There is also mention of a 1998 *'Maritime Military Strategy'* document, which was a classified document⁸, and it is possible that the SDR and this strategy document are the same. The term, *'Naval Diplomacy'*, thus found permanency in India's maritime outlook and the *"fundamental issue that was apparent was that the IN was looking at being a capability-based navy rather than threat based one, seeking cooperation with the navies of like-minded maritime nations"*.⁹

India's steady outreach and maritime engagements led to its rise as a responsible nation and stabiliser in the IOR. By 2009, India had established its maritime footprint in the IOR, was stepping out into the broader Indo-Pacific and was engaging with more nations and their navies to ensure what is now known as *'freedom of navigation'*, and the *'openness'* of oceans. Over the years, from a set of sporadic and nascent maritime interactions India's outreach has evolved to contemporary concepts and initiatives like Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), Neighbourhood First, the Act East and Look West policies, the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), and the Coalition for Disaster Relief Infrastructure (CDRI).

⁵ See Table 7.2 - Objectives, Missions and Tasks in Diplomatic Role, *Indian Maritime Doctrine*, Naval Strategic Publication 1.1 (NSP 1.1), Indian Navy, p 108, updated online version available at <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/indian-maritime-doctrine-2015-version>

⁶ Geoffery Till, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century*, Routledge, Fourth Edition, 2018, Oxford/ New York, p 390

⁷ Rahul Roy Choudhary, *India's Maritime Security*, Knowledge World, New Delhi, 2000, p 125

⁸ Vice Admiral Anup Singh, *Blue Waters Abov: The Indian Navy 2001 – 2010*, Integrated Headquarters of Ministry of Defence (Navy), 2018, pp 312

⁹ Captain Sarabjeet Singh Parmar, *The Indian Navy's Maritime Outlook: The Path Walked since Independence*, Journal of the United Service Institution of India, Vol. CL, No. 622, October-December 2020

Towards supporting these contemporary concepts and initiatives, the efforts of the IN have been encapsulated in the third constituent strategy specified in its 2015 unclassified strategy document, *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy (IMSS 2015)*.¹⁰ This third constituent strategy, ‘The Strategy for Shaping a Favourable and Positive Maritime Environment’ simply covered what the IN had been doing for some years to “to promote security and stability at sea, and enhance cooperation, mutual understanding and interoperability with maritime forces of friendly nations”¹¹, in its evolution towards becoming an established and responsible regional maritime power.

To ensure transparency and clarity of intent, the Indian meaning of the terms ‘Favourable’ and ‘Positive’ were defined as ‘A favourable maritime environment entails conditions of security and stability at sea, with various threats remaining at a low level’, and ‘A positive maritime environment implies conditions wherein any rise in threats can be prevented or contained’,¹² Respectively. Further, in order to achieve the identified Maritime Security Objective (MSO), ‘To shape a favourable and positive maritime environment, for enhancing net security in India’s areas of maritime interest’, this constituent strategy looked at:¹³

- Engagement with maritime forces of friendly nations in a number of ways and at multiple levels.
- Naval deployments for exercising presence in our areas of interest.
- Maritime capacity building and capability enhancement through cooperation in training, technical areas, and hydrography.
- Cooperative efforts for development of regional Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA).
- Conduct of maritime security operations, both independently and in coordination with other maritime forces in the region.

A major step towards shaping a favourable and positive maritime environment has been the steady increase and institutionalisation of maritime exercises carried out by the IN with various navies and maritime forces (see Table 1 for details).

Ser	Nation(s)	Exercise	Ser	Nation(s)	Exercise
Bilateral Exercises					
1.	Australia	AUSINDEX	2.	Bangladesh	BONGOSAGAR
3.	France	VARUNA	4.	Indonesia	SAMUDRA SHAKTI
5.	Japan	JIMEX	6.	Malaysia	SAMUDRA LAKSMANA
7.	Myanmar	IMNEX	8.	Oman	NASEEM AL BAHR
9.	Qatar	ZAIR AL BAHR	10.	Russia	INDRA
11.	Saudi Arabia	AL MOHED AL HINDI	12.	Singapore	SIMBEX

¹⁰ Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy (IMSS 2015), Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy) New Delhi, October 2015, p (i), available at https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Indian_Maritime_Security_Strategy_Document_25Jan16.pdf

¹¹ Ibid, p 11

¹² Ibid, p 80

¹³ Ibid

Ser	Nation(s)	Exercise	Ser	Nation(s)	Exercise
13.	Sri Lanka	SLINEX	14.	UAE	ZAYED TALWAR
15.	United Kingdom	KONKAN	16.	Vietnam	IN VPN BILAT
Multilateral Exercises					
17.	Australia, France, USA, Japan	LAPEROUSE	18.	Australia, Japan, USA	MALABAR
19.	Brazil South Africa	IBSAMAR	20.	Singapore Thailand	SITMEX

Table 1: List of Indian Navy's Institutionalised Exercises

Source: Indian Navy

However, the IN had been exercising with navies and maritime agencies even prior to the increase in number and institutionalisation of these exercises. For example, the MALABAR series of exercises with the US Navy started in 1992, and gradually grew to include Japan and Australia; with the French Navy the first bilateral exercise was held in 1993 and was later institutionalised as Exercise VARUNA in 2001. Apart from these institutionalised exercises, which can be placed at the strategic-operational level, the IN also carries out Coordinated Patrols (CORPATS), which may be placed at the operational-tactical level. Presently, the IN carries out CORPATS with the navies of Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar, and Thailand. These CORPATS are conducted by ships and aircraft operating on their respective side of an International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) or Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and are meant to enhance maritime security by addressing “*the range of non-traditional maritime security challenges, including maritime terrorism, gun running, human and drug trafficking, and poaching*”.¹⁴ MILAN (a Hindi word meaning ‘meeting’) is a multinational exercise conducted by the IN once every two years, on and off the eastern coast of India. It began, in 1995, as a biennial interaction between junior and mid-level naval officers from five nations of the Indian Ocean and has gradually morphed into a major exercise off India’s eastern coast. The 2022 version, conducted from end-February to early-March, witnessed the participation of as many as 40 nations, with the overwhelming majority being from the Indo-Pacific region.¹⁵ This showcases the importance Indo-Pacific nations attach to cooperation and exercising together. As strategies flow from doctrine, both CORPATS and bi/multilateral exercises have been placed as tasks under the diplomatic role, which is the main role supporting the constituent strategy towards shaping a favourable and positive maritime environment.¹⁶

Navies and maritime forces accrue several advantages by exercising together. In the Indian context, IMSS 2015 identified the following advantages, all of which could be considered ubiquitous¹⁷:

¹⁴ Ibid, p 96

¹⁵ Government of India/ Ministry of Defence Press Release, *Indian Navy's Multi-National Exercise Milan-2022 to Commence 25 February 2022*, 23 February 2022, available at <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1800604>

¹⁶ IMSS 2015, Table 5.1, p 79

¹⁷ IMSS 2015, p 85

- Showcases projection of capabilities.
- Aids honing of operational skills.
- Provides opportunities to imbibe best practices and procedures
- Enables doctrinal learning.
- Aids benchmarking of capabilities in a benign international environment.
- Develops trust, mutual friendship, and respect.

For a long period, India (and its navy) operated largely independently in addressing maritime security challenges and risks. This approach was based on the Indian stance of ‘*Strategic Autonomy*’ and to avoid being seen as part of an alliance. However, the IN did coordinate with other navies and groupings of navies for specific objectives, such as combating piracy off the Horn of Africa. As the trust factor improved, relations with nations grew, interactions increased, and interoperability evolved, India signed logistics agreements with several nations. These logistics agreements aid enhancing of interoperability and access to ‘places’¹⁸ thereby extending presence in areas of maritime interest. India also initiated 2+2 dialogues involving bilateral parleys between the ministers of defence and foreign/ external affairs of Australia, Japan, Russia, and USA.

India presently has logistic-support agreements with Australia, France, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, USA, and Vietnam. These have facilitated interoperability, which will only increase with time. During MILAN 2022, a P8A, which is a Multi-Mission Maritime Patrol and Reconnaissance Aircraft of the US Navy, operated from the Indian Naval Air Station at Visakhapatnam.¹⁹ In April 2022, a P8I, which is the Indian equivalent of the P8A aircraft operated from Darwin with Royal Australian Air Force P8 aircraft. Aircraft from both nations carried out coordinated operations in Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) and surface surveillance with an aim to enhance MDA.²⁰ MDA as a strategic tool and area of cooperation has gained considerable impetus. This is evident from the multitude of cooperative mechanisms that have emerged across the Indo-Pacific. These range from White Shipping Agreements, the positioning of International Liaison Officers, (ILOs) at various International Fusion Centres (IFCs) across the region, the sharing of information between these IFCs, and extend to the recently announced Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPPMDA) by QUAD leaders in May 2022²¹. Subsequently, in May 2022, an Indian P8I operated from the French island of Reunion and undertook coordinated surveillance missions in the area with the French Navy to enhance

¹⁸ While a base would invariably become a legitimate target in conflict, a place would invariably become a legitimate target if the ‘Law of Neutrality’ is abrogated by the host nation

¹⁹ Indian Navy Press Release, *Indian Navy Welcome P8A of US Navy MILAN 2022*, available at <https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/indian-navy-welcome-p8a-us-navy-millan-2022>

²⁰ Indian Navy Press Release, *India - Australia Maritime Patrol Reconnaissance Aircraft (MPRA) Coordinated Operations*, available at <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/india-australia-maritime-patrol-reconnaissance-aircraft-mpra-coordinated-operations>

²¹ See Government of India/ Ministry of External Affairs Press Release, *Prime Minister’s participation in the Quad Leaders’ Summit*, 24 May 2022, available at https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35354/Prime_Ministers_participation_in_the_Quad_Leaders_Summit, and the White House Statement, *Quad Joint Leaders’ Statement*, 24 May 2022, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/24/quad-joint-leaders-statement/>

maritime security and safety in the southern Indian Ocean, including the Mozambique Channel.²² India continues to deliver assistance to its neighbours under ‘*Mission Sagar*’, which was launched in May 2020 to combat the Covid-19 crises, with the ninth deployment under this mission being undertaken as recently as in May of 2022.²³

As part of its ongoing endeavour to cement maritime security interoperability and enhance cooperate mechanisms across the wide maritime swath of the Indo-Pacific, the IN sent a warship and a P8I aircraft to participate in the 2022 edition of the US coordinated, biennial ‘Rim of the Pacific’ Exercise (RIMPAC) 2022,²⁴ and also joined the multilateral Bahrain based Combined Maritime Force (CMF) as an Associate Partner.²⁵ This latter step will not only strengthen maritime security cooperation in the western Indian Ocean but also effectively implement the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) and complete implementation of the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA).²⁶ These two agreements, along with the existing General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) and Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), will strengthen maritime security as there would be a common base to interoperate from, with not only the US but also its allies, especially those of the QUAD. These efforts add impetus to the ‘*all inclusive*’ approach amplified in India’s ‘*Free, Open and Inclusive*’ vision of the Indo-Pacific. Five basic principles were also highlighted during the first ever open maritime security debate, ‘*Enhancing Maritime Security – A Case for International Cooperation*’ at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) by the Indian Prime Minister on 09 August 2021. The debate was held under India’s Presidency of the UNSC, and the following five basic principles highlighted by the Prime Minister were discussed, and were subsequently addressed in the ensuing UNSC statement:²⁷

- Removal of barriers from legitimate maritime trade.
- Peaceful settlement of disputes as per international law.
- Joint addressal of natural disasters and maritime threats created by non-state actors.
- Preservation of the maritime environment and maritime resources.
- Encouragement of responsible maritime connectivity.

²² Indian Navy News and Updates, *P8I LRRM ASW Aircraft at La Reunion Island*, available at <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/p8i-lrrm-asw-aircraft-la-reunion-island>

²³ For more details see Government of India/ Ministry of Defence Press Release, *Mission Sagar*, 26 Dec 2021, available at <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1785282>, and Indian Navy Press Release, and *Deployment of INS Gharial to Seychelles – Mission Sagar IX*, available at <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/deployment-ins-gharial-seychelles-%E2%80%93-mission-sagar-ix>

²⁴ Indian Navy News and Updates, *INS Satpura Arrives at Pearl Harbour in Hawaii to Participate in RIMPAC-22*, available at <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/ins-satpura-arrives-pearl-harbour-hawaii-participate-rimpac-22-0>

²⁵ Government of India/ Ministry of Defence Press Release, *Press Statement by Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh after India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue*, 12 April 2022, available at <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1815838>

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ See Government of India/ Press Information Bureau Press Release, *English translation of Prime Minister’s remarks at the UNSC High-Level Open Debate on “Enhancing Maritime Security: A Case For International Cooperation” (August 9, 2021)*, 09 August 2021, available at <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PMO=3&PRID=1744170>, and UNSC, *Statement by the President of the Security Council, S/PRST/2021/15* dated 09 August 2021, available at <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/220/62/PDF/N2122062.pdf?OpenElement>

These aspects form the nucleus of discussion in the many minilaterals India is engaged in, such as India-Japan-Australia, India-France-Australia (which has been impacted by AUKUS and needs to be recommenced), India-Japan-USA, India-Indonesia-Australia, and India-Sri Lanka-Maldives to name just a few. The India-Sri Lanka-Maldives trilateral has evolved into the Colombo Security Conclave with Mauritius joining as a member, and Bangladesh and Seychelles as observers. During the recently held 6th Deputy National Security Advisor (Dy NSA) Level Meeting of the Conclave held on 07 July 2022 the implementation of the Roadmap for Cooperation for 2022-23 and the decisions taken at the 5th NSA-level meeting on the following five pillars were discussed²⁸:

- Maritime Safety and Security.
- Countering Terrorism and Radicalisation.
- Combating Trafficking and Transnational Organised Crime.
- Cyber Security, Protection of Critical Infrastructure and Technology.
- Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR).

First of all, for India, such activities, especially deliberation within the minilaterals, help by “*not only strengthening its partnerships with key powers in the region but also diversifying its reach*”.²⁹ Secondly, these activities amplify the regional nations and India’s joint endeavours to shape an inclusive favourable and positive maritime environment in the Indo-Pacific region, which for India stretches from the east coast of Africa to the Americas.

US Alliances

In 1796, in his farewell address, George Washington, the first President of the USA, stated that “*It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world*”.³⁰ This statement, perhaps, was based on the existential internal dynamics, and flowed from the geographical position of the US with oceans on both coasts that created natural barriers and ensured distance from the existing global power centres of that time. Over time two changes took place:

- First, as the US evolved into a global power and a resident Indo-Pacific nation, the same oceans were perceived as having been transformed from limiting factors to the main connectivity factors.

²⁸ Government of India/ Ministry of External Affairs Press Release, *Joint Press Release of the 6th Deputy National Security Adviser Level Meeting of the Colombo Security Conclave*, 07 July 2022, available at https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35481/Joint_Press_Release_of_the_6th_Deputy_National_Security_Adviser_Level_Meeting_of_the_Colombo_Security_Conclave

²⁹ Tehelka Webdesk, *India in the Era of Rising Minilateralism*, 16 January 2022, available at <http://tehelka.com/india-in-the-era-of-rising-minilateralism/>

³⁰ The Avalon Project, *Washington's Farewell Address 1796*, Yale Law School, available at https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp

- Secondly, the changing global environment, exemplified by the two World Wars and numerous International Armed Conflicts (IACs) and Non-International Armed Conflicts (NIACs)³¹ that followed the Second World War, saw the rise of US alliances.

Alliances have been an important bedrock of US Foreign policy and engagement matrix, and the main base of the international rules-based order, which has evolved into the existent contemporary complex maze, accommodating strategic partners and their divergent views. US alliances have also been termed as ‘*Crucial Enablers in Great Power Competition*’.³² These post Second World War alliances were essentially established to counter the anticipated spread of communism, with NATO addressing the erstwhile USSR, and in East Asia, the San Francisco System “referred to by John Foster Dulles as the ‘hub and spokes’ system”³³, with the US as the hub. This system can be considered a by-product of the Cold War that was born in Europe and hence “*The US-Soviet confrontation, as well as the resulting changes, crises and local conflicts in the Asia-Pacific region, led to the military alliance between the US and some Asia-Pacific countries*”³⁴. Further, for the US this system “*was distinct from the multilateral security alliances it preferred in Europe*”.³⁵ In the San Francisco system one major weakness was that there was “*no apparent connections between the spokes*”³⁶. However, the strength of the system lay in the bilateral alliances between the US and the alliance nation. Given the varying dynamics of both Europe and Asia, both these alliance systems operated in silos. Therefore, “*While some NATO members joined the United Nations’ enforcement action in Korea in the 1950s, it was not a NATO operation*”³⁷ and similarly “*The Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s mobilised the San Francisco allies minus Japan, but not a single NATO member*”.³⁸ Thus, to draw parity between NATO and any other existing Indo-Pacific structure, particularly the QUAD, may not be the right approach. However, the growing interest and presence of non-resident European nations and the European Union (EU) need to be factored when assessing the maritime environment of the Indo-Pacific.

From hard power and its concertation upon State-on-State challenges, which are still ongoing, US alliances are now facing myriads of threats that originate from non-hard power sources like piracy, climate change and pandemics, to name a few. The US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, in his speech on ‘*Reaffirming and Reimagining America’s Alliances*’, at NATO Headquarters

³¹ There is a general global clarity and acceptance on what an IAC is. In the case of NIACs, there are divergent views. For this paper the definition of NIACs, which covers most of the scenarios, has been taken from Article 1 (1) of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the protection of victims of NIACs (Protocol II), of 8 June 1977

³² See Andrew A Mitcha, *US Alliances: Crucial Enablers in Great-Power Competition*, Heritage 2021 Essays, 17 Nov 2021, available at <https://www.heritage.org/military-strength-topical-essays/2021-essays/us-alliances-crucial-enablers-great-power-competition>

³³ Victor D Cha, *Powerplay: Origins of the US Alliance System in Asia*, *International Security* 34(3), December 2010, p 158

³⁴ Li Chen, *The US Military Alliances Supporting the Asia-Pacific Rebalance Strategy*, p 316, available at https://www.academia.edu/36679013/The_US_Military_Alliances_supporting_the_Asia_Pacific_Rebalance_strategy

³⁵ Victor D Cha, p 158

³⁶ *Ibid*, p 161

³⁷ Michael Wesley, *Global Allies in a Changing World*, in Michael Wesley (ed), *Global Allies: Comparing US Alliances in the 21st Century*, Australia National University Press, 2017, p 3

³⁸ *Ibid*

on 24 March 2021 highlighted the following aspects³⁹ that will influence the shaping of a favourable and positive maritime environment in the Indo-Pacific:

- According to a recent poll by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, nine in ten Americans believe that maintaining alliances is the most effective way to achieve US foreign policy goals.
- Threats have multiplied, competition has stiffened, and power dynamics have shifted.
- Aspects impacting the alliances:
 - Hard power threats from China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea.
 - Non-military threats from most of the above nations.
 - Global crises like climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - Global terrorism.
 - Erosion of the trust factor, i.e., trust in each other and in the strength of US commitments.

Supporting a meaningful alliance has, at times, been at cross purposes with the US strategy of ‘Offshore Balancing’. As per Mearsheimer, “Under offshore balancing, the United States would calibrate its military posture according to the distribution of power in the three key regions”.⁴⁰ Though the three key regions mentioned by Mearsheimer are Europe, the Gulf and Northeast Asia, the same logic could be extended to the South and East China Seas, where the proximity of US forces would reduce the reaction time. Mearsheimer further states that, “Offshore balancing may seem like a radical strategy today, but it provided the guiding logic of US foreign policy for many decades and served the country well”.⁴¹ The Cold War and threat from the USSR forced the US to position forces ‘Onshore’ in Europe and Northeast Asia and the ‘Hub and Spoke’ alliance system in Asia emerged, which now also looks at countering the threat from China, as mentioned earlier. However, the allocation of resources and associated investments by the US have led to domestically-pertinent questions about ‘fair’ burden-sharing arrangements, which has, in fact, been a long-standing issue in US alliance relationships.⁴² “An April 2016 Pew poll found that 57 percent of Americans agree that the United States should deal with its own problems and let others deal with theirs the best they can.”⁴³ This poll seems to contradict the poll numbers quoted by Blinken at NATO headquarters, even though these two polls were conducted five years apart. However, ‘problems’, especially those that have a global impact, become ‘everyone’s problems’ and hence need more involvement by nations impacted by them, even if the characteristics change across regions. The poll by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, which was carried out in 2021, mentioned the percentage view of the US middle class regarding the use of diplomatic tools such as international agreements, alliances, and participating in international organisations as US foreign policy tools, as well as on US global military presence. With respect to diplomatic tools, 45% said that not enough was being done,

³⁹ Speech by Anthony Blinken (video and transcript) available at <https://www.state.gov/reaffirming-and-reimagining-americas-alliances/>

⁴⁰ John J Mearsheimer and Stephen M Walt, *The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior US Grand Strategy*, Foreign Affairs, Vol 95 No 4, July/ August 2016, p 73

⁴¹ Ibid, p 75

⁴² See Lindsey W. Ford and James Goldgeier, *Who are America’s Allies and are they Paying their Fair Share of Defence?*, Policy 2020 Brookings, Voter Vitals, available at <https://www.brookings.edu/policy2020/votervitals/>

⁴³ Mearsheimer, p 70

38% said that enough was being done, and the balance thought that too much was being done. Significantly, 63% supported maintaining of US military presence in the Asia-Pacific.⁴⁴ These figures provide the US the internal support towards its alliances and avenues, like the recent QUAD initiatives on MDA and Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, to look at issues over and above the alliances.

The US will need to keep emphasising its interest and a high degree of commitment, in order to maintain a high trust factor. Trust is also a major issue between the spokes of the ‘*Hub and Spoke*’ system, and stems from the Second World War. Unlike Europe, where NATO was operating on a mutually accepted multilateral engagement matrix, the same could not be repeated in Asia for several reasons including trust, religion, varying types of governance, low intraregional trade⁴⁵, resulting in the US resorting to bilateral or trilateral alliance arrangements. However, improved relations over time and the changing strategic environment of the Indo-Pacific have resulted in the growth of a number of minilaterals like the US-Japan-Australia Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD), Japan-South Korea-China Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat, US-Japan-Korea Trilateral Cooperation Oversight Group (TCOG), and the US-Japan-EU Trilateral Commission, amongst others.⁴⁶ The end of the Cold War also saw the rise in value of intra-regional organisations like the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), which focussed on problem-solving, tension-reduction, and confidence-building.⁴⁷

Alliances are, thus, a complex arrangement and face a multitude of challenges, and as mentioned earlier, in the case of the US have been identified at the doctrinal level. Despite the complexity and multitude of challenges, the US alliances, in the region now known as the Indo-Pacific, provide a security blanket through ‘*security guarantees*’ that are meant to deter or address any conflict arising from power transition and balance of power struggle. This security blanket also provides the requisite degree of stability, security, and peace, which in aggregate, enables a high degree of functionality of the minilaterals. Under this security blanket the pursuit of a softer, and hence more acceptable, approach to address ‘*Holistic Maritime Security*’ issues via platforms as well as initiatives like those recently agreed upon by the QUAD leaders, the IPOI, and the ASEAN Approach to the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), to name a few, could be progressed.

QUAD

The QUAD, since its birth from the Tsunami Core Group of 2004, has followed a trajectory that most loosely formed arrangements without a steadfast focussed approach follow.⁴⁸ One major

⁴⁴ See Poll Results - *A Foreign Policy for the Middle Class—What Do Americans Think?*, Figures 14 and 15, available at https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/ccs2021_fpmc.pdf

⁴⁵ Victor D Cha, p 161 and 162

⁴⁶ See Victor D Cha, *Powerplay: The Origins of the American Alliance System in Asia*, Princeton University Press, 2016, p 198

⁴⁷ Ibid, p 196

⁴⁸ For a detailed analysis of the QUADs’ formative years from 2007 to 2017 see Tanvi Madan, *The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of the QUAD*, Commentary, War on the Rocks, 16 November 2017, available at <https://warontherocks.com/2017/11/rise-fall-rebirth-quad/>; and from 2017 to 2019 see HDP Envall, *The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue: Towards An Indo-Pacific Order?*, RSIS Policy Report, September 2019, available at https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/PR190909_The-Quadrilateral-Security-Dialogue.pdf

reason for the lack of a common focussed approach could be the expansion of the acronym QUAD as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, which China has viewed as an anti-Chinese hard-core military grouping. This also led to many Indo-Pacific nations, especially ASEAN, viewing the QUAD with scepticism, despite the fledgling benign steps taken by it. The second MALABAR exercise conducted in 2007 (referred as MALABAR 2007-02), which saw participation by the navies of the QUAD nations, Singapore, and the United Kingdom⁴⁹, faced its share of criticism both domestically and regionally, which added to the weakening of the QUAD approach to matters maritime. Two lessons emerge that could be considered, which could assuage the scepticism of most Indo-Pacific nations, except perhaps China:

- First, delink QUAD from the MALABAR series of exercises, and portray the exercise as a standalone initiative. This would require deft strategic communications. To add impetus to the common open and free Indo-Pacific approach, and to enhance inclusivity, the option of increasing participation of other regional navies could be considered. While positioning of observers' onboard ships in the first instance could be considered, physical participation by other maritime agencies should also be kept open. To keep the exercise focussed, and to increase interoperability in incremental steps, the number of participating units and scope of the exercise would have to be restricted based on the area of the exercise and dynamics of that area. This means that the exercise would have to be conducted in more maritime areas of the Indo-Pacific than hitherto.
- Secondly, portray QUAD as a “*a loose entente of like-minded democracies within the Indo-Pacific’s emerging security multilateralism*”⁵⁰ aiming to address non-traditional threats, risks, and challenges, which are impacting all nations of the region. This aspect has also been emphasised by the US Indo-Pacific Strategy of 2022, “*We will support and empower allies and partners as they take on regional leadership roles themselves, and we will work in flexible groupings that pool our collective strength to face up to the defining issues of our time, particularly through the Quad*”.⁵¹ All such endeavours would need a consistent push from the top political levels with a continuous follow through.

While the first point needs consideration, the second point is being addressed since the first QUAD Leaders’ Summit held in March 2021. This online meeting during the period of global lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic was reflective of the 2004 Tsunami which brought the four nations together. In a parallel to the 2004 Tsunami Core Group this first summit meeting, focussed on a global threat, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, which like 2004 warranted the benign use of national assets. The meeting was held online due to the travel restrictions imposed by the ongoing pandemic. The setting up of the following partnership and groups were discussed during the meeting⁵²:

⁴⁹ Authors input from his participation in Malabar 2007-02. Most analyses and reports of Malabar 2007-02 refer to the participation of five nations-QUAD and Singapore. One ship of the Royal Navy of the United Kingdom had also participated, an aspect that often gets omitted

⁵⁰ Sourabh Gupta, *Quad’s India Problem: No Different from Beijing*, RSIS Commentary, No. 147 – 7 October 2021, available at <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/CO21147.pdf>

⁵¹ *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States*, February 2022, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>

⁵² For details see White House Briefing Room, *Fact Sheet: QUAD Summit*, 12 March 2021, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/12/fact-sheet-quad-summit/>

- Vaccine partnership and setting up of a senior level vaccine experts' group to address the ongoing pandemic and bring it to an end.
- Climate working group, which would focus on addressing climate change related risks, threats, and challenges.
- Critical and Emerging Technology Working Group, which would look at technologies required to ensure a free, open, inclusive, and resilient Indo-Pacific.

The three aspects discussed in March 2021 highlighted the soft power approach of the QUAD. In a quick follow up and to take advantage of the opening of international travel, the second QUAD summit was held physically in Washington in September 2021. This meeting while following up the three aspects discussed in the March 2021 meeting also looked at four more aspects, which could reinforce the soft power approach of the QUAD⁵³:

- **Covid and Global Health.** The success of the initiatives launched after the first summit meeting were a clear indication that the measures adopted by the QUAD nations were in line with the fundamental underpinning that brought the QUAD nations together for a second time — the underpinning being a stable, secure, and peaceful Indo-Pacific.
- **Climate.** Climate change has been identified as one of the most impactful threats running across the full spectrum of maritime security and safety. Therefore, addressing climate change issues would need a deeper interaction as it is impacting national interests, of which sovereignty issues are the most sensitive. Survival as a nation due to sea level rise is a major cause of concern for island nations. Therefore, the decision to convene a Climate and Information Services Task Force and provide technical assistance to small island developing states through the CDRI initiative is one of the many steps that will empower Indo-Pacific nations to address climate change issues effectively.
- **Critical and Emerging Technologies.** Sharing of technology has always been a sensitive issue. The setting up of the Critical and Emerging Technology Working Group and subsequent planned actions like launch of the statement of principles and identification of four areas; technical standards, 5G diversification and deployment, horizon-scanning, and technology supply chains could aid more cooperation and collaboration.
- **Infrastructure.** The QUAD is looking at delivery of quality infrastructure and this approach is based on the G7's *Build Back Better World* (B3W), which is an infrastructure partnership focused on digital connectivity, climate, health and health security, and gender equality infrastructure. The QUAD Infrastructure Coordination Group set up by this summit will work with regional partners, thereby enhancing the inclusivity factor.
- **People to People Exchange and Education.** Establishment of a QUAD fellowship as a scholarship programme, is aimed at developing a network of science and technology experts, which would advance innovation and collaboration in the private, public, and academic sectors of their own nations, as amongst the QUAD. As a philanthropic initiative, which would be administered by a non-governmental taskforce, this network would, in all probability, work at the Track 1.5/ 2 level and enhance exchange at those levels.

⁵³ Government of India/ Ministry of External Affairs, *Fact Sheet: QUAD Leaders Summit*, 24 September 2021, available at <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/34319/Fact+Sheet+Quad+Leaders+Summit>

- **Cyber Security.** The need for a cooperative and concentrated focus on the cyber domain and related security aspects cannot be over emphasised. Like the earlier two points, the setting up of a QUAD Senior Cyber Group should benefit the region by improving liaison between governments and industry to enhance critical-infrastructure resilience against cyber threats
- **Space.** The expertise of the QUAD in the domain of space, and analysis of data from space-based assets is envisaged to be leveraged to assist nations in addressing the multitude of risks, threats, and challenges emanating from climate change, and also related to sustainable use of oceans and marine resources, to start with. The aim is to build capacities of Indo-Pacific nations in space related domains, which will require a high degree of investment and time.

The third QUAD summit was held virtually on 03 March 2022 and was followed in quick succession by the fourth QUAD Summit, which was the second physical meeting, and was held on 24 May 2022 in Tokyo. The frequency of the QUAD summits to discuss initiatives taken and oversee progress made, is perhaps, indicative of the QUAD's desire to keep a focus upon mutually agreed and discussed aspects, aimed at benefitting the Indo-Pacific region, and to ensure that the requisite impetus is maintained. The fourth summit reviewed the progress made in all the aspects discussed so far and introduced two new initiatives:⁵⁴

- **The Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPPMDA).** Over the next five years this partnership aims to provide an integrated maritime picture of the Pacific Islands, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). This will enable nations to tackle maritime crime by tracking dark shipping, improve ability to respond to climate and humanitarian events, and address IUU fishing.
- **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Mechanism.** Since the 2004 Tsunami, the Indo-Pacific is rife with natural disasters, and this mechanism aims to enable more effective and timely responses to disasters.

It is evident that there are overlaps in all the initiatives. To ensure smooth functioning the QUAD will have to ensure the right composition of the groups that would be able to handle issues like inherent sensitivities and different governance models across the Indo-Pacific. Most importantly, '*steerageway*'⁵⁵ must not be lost and that would require constant monitoring from the topmost governance echelons.

Contours of Convergence

It is evident that the numerous individual and regional soft power initiatives and influencing factors from US alliances weave a complex web. Therefore, there is a need to maintain the right mix of hard and soft or benign approaches and supporting elements to address the myriad of threats, challenges, and risks in the Indo-Pacific in a complementary, constructive, and cooperative manner. The pace at which cooperative mechanisms, especially at the QUAD

⁵⁴ For details see White House Briefing Room, *Fact Sheet: QUAD Leaders Tokyo Summit 2022*, 23 May 2022, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/23/fact-sheet-quad-leaders-tokyo-summit-2022/>

⁵⁵ Steerageway can be defined as the rate of motion required to sufficiently make a ship or boat respond to movements of the rudder and hence maintain direction.

initiatives and comfort levels. There is a view that addressing only non-traditional risks, threats, and challenges reduces centrality, like the view in respect of the East Asia Summit (EAS).⁶² This notwithstanding, there is a need to quell the notion of QUAD as a hard security dialogue, which is a major impediment in translating policies to tangible actions, as many ASEAN nations would view the option between QUAD and China as ‘*choosing sides*’.

China is a major factor and will remain one for a considerable period, and hence will be part of any Indo-Pacific cooperative calculus. China’s interaction with nations varies based on strengths, weaknesses, and competition that it perceives. For China, India is a competitor, and any sort of perceived rivalry will increase as India’s position in the global hierarchy rises and standing as a preferred security partner increases. For India, while presently, the imminent Chinese hard power threat is on land, strengthening of the inherent maritime geographical advantage in the IOR will balance that threat and in time tilt it in India’s favour. In the broader IOR, any Chinese maritime threat of consequence will take time to build up and would impinge the situation and engagement matrix in the South and East China Seas. Towards this the hard military element of US alliances and strategic partnerships will play a major role in keeping China engaged in the South and East China Seas. This will require deft handling and an understanding at the politico-strategic-operational levels regarding supporting deployments and actions in these maritime areas.

It can be appreciated that while US alliances, given the hard power approach, will address issues related to power transition and power balancing in the Indo-Pacific, there is a need for a softer approach to address the non-hard power issues. Towards this QUAD based initiatives, IPOI, AOIP, and minilaterals, to name a few, can be considered as the platforms to address ‘*Holistic Maritime Security*’ and shape a favourable and positive Indo-Pacific maritime environment.

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⁶² See Gurjit Singh, “*The Centrality of the East Asia Summit is Under Challenge*”, Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, Expert Speak, 07 July 2022, available at <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-centrality-of-the-east-asia-summit-is-under-challenge/>