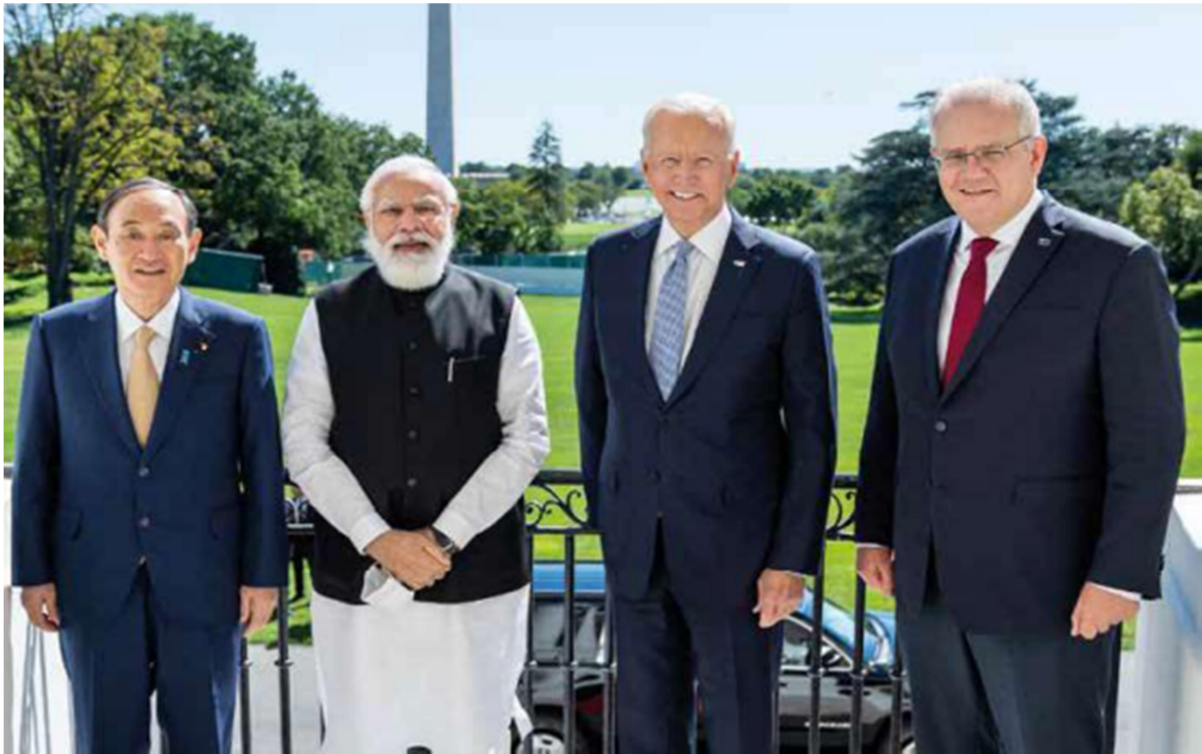


Will AUKUS Complement or Relegate QUAD?

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The AUKUS (Australia-the United Kingdom-the United States) security pact, which was made public barely a week before the first in-person QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) summit on 24 September 2021, generated debate and discussion globally. AUKUS and QUAD have common character and objectives. The fundamental difference between the two is, AUKUS is a trilateral cooperative agreement to transfer military technology to Australia, and QUAD is a quadrilateral non-military strategic consultative platform between Australia, Japan, India and the United States.

QUAD is a loosely bound hybrid platform that intends to address a range of non-military issues for a free, open and rule-based Indo-Pacific. The QUAD began as an ad hoc grouping after the Tsunami in 2004. After a decade of inactivity since its formation in 2007, it resurfaced in discussions in 2017 under the Trump Administration

at Japan's initiative. Again, there was no activity in the next four years. Nine months after the border scuffle between China and India on 20 June 2020 at Galwan valley, QUAD countries held the first leader level summit virtually on 12 March 2021, presumably, at India's diplomatic enthusiasm and persuasion. After the virtual summit, QUAD leaders issued a joint statement entitled 'The Spirit of Quad! Aside from focusing on combating the COVID-19 epidemic, the statement promised "to strengthen cooperation on the defining challenges ... promoting a free, open rules-based order, rooted in international law to advance security and prosperity and counter threats to both in the Indo-Pacific and beyond". According to the statement, the QUAD leaders are committed to supporting "freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful resolution of disputes, democratic values, and territorial integrity".

Six months after the virtual summit, QUAD leaders met in person. Leaders talked on a wide range of topics like climate change, global sufferings from COVID-19 pandemic, supply chain, 5G technology, free Indo-Pacific and ASEAN Cooperation as well as a recommitment to the mutual partnership of shared security and prosperity besides “promoting the free, open rules-based order, rooted in international law and undaunted by coercion, to bolster security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and beyond” and recognized that the regional security has become ever complex. COVID-19 response and progress in relief dominated the joint statement.

QUAD leaders also discussed the issue of emerging technology like 5G technology and chips, for example.

According to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade, QUAD countries’ total import from China was USD 715.07 billion and export was 387.33 billion in 2020. The USA, China's largest trading partner went into a trade war with China which could neither bring US companies back home nor turn the trade balance. Together, QUAD countries intend to turn the tables.

On the military side, the QUAD was paralleled by the naval Exercise Malabar which began as a bilateral



AUKUS and QUAD members view the two-prong Chinese advancement into the Indo-Pacific and beyond-hard and soft power. Hard power is China's vertical and horizontal development of military capacity. Soft power is an economy-oriented activity globally.

The joint statements’ focus is the cooperative development of soft power without reference to the military dimension anywhere in the statements. Long discussion on the COVID-19 vaccine was intended to deal with vaccine diplomacy.

naval drill between the USA and India in 1992, suspended after India’s nuclear test in 1998 and resumed after 9/11 when India joined the US “global war on terror”.

Exercise Malabar was not mandated by the QUAD. It has been a regular annual naval event of the countries that are also members of the Quad. Japan joined the naval Exercise in 2007, the year QUAD was formed. USA, JAPAN and India have been regular participants since 2007. Australia participated in 2007 and

2020. Exercise Malabar is a multilateral naval drill outside the QUAD mandate, although the media often tend to play down the Exercise as 'Quad Naval Drill or Exercise' China also views it as such. The Exercise has been conducted in the waters abutting the Indian and the Pacific Ocean like the Bay of Bengal, Philippine Sea, Sea of Japan, Arabian Sea etc, except the South China Sea and the East China Sea. The huge

military dimension of AUKUS seemingly prevents any probability from including the military component in the QUAD. Thus, AUKUS relegates QUAD from having any military texture in the future.

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